

Window on Jordan

Actors celebrate, demand legal reforms

By Ibtisam Awadat
Star Staff Writer

ALTHOUGH HE cannot be a member, Mahmoud Abu Ghareeb was there to congratulate the first elected president and council members of the Jordanian Actors Association (JAA). For him the birth of the association is a dream which had come true.

Abu Ghareeb, 73, is one of the most well-known Jordanian actors in the Arab World. He was a key founder of the Jordanian Actors Federation in 1977. Last Friday was an unusual day for him. He attended the first elections of the new JAA but without casting his vote. After more than 30 years as an actor involved in numerous drama and TV

productions, representing Jordan wherever he went, Abu Ghareeb has now found that, technically, he is not a Jordanian citizen according to the law of the new JAA, which was ratified by Parliament last year.

"I was the first to fight for establishing a special association for Jordanian actors, since 1968, and after 30 years I now find myself along with other colleagues banned from the association," Abu Ghareeb, a Gazan who holds a two-year passport, says sadly.

The law of the former Jordanian Actors Federation required that members should have Jordanian passports and be residents in the Kingdom. But

Article 6 of the law of the new JAA states that "All members in the association must be Jordanian citizens and holders of a national number in addition to being permanent residents in the country".

Consequently, Abu Ghareeb doesn't fit this definition since he holds a two-year Jordanian passport.

"I feel sad because after these long years those who were babies or who were creeping when we began working to promote Jordanian drama will decide the fate of the pioneers," Abu Ghareeb says. He expressed his anger at those who

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Al Refai

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اسبوعية سياسية مستقلة

Ma'an still under curfew after two-day riots

By Raed Al Abed
and agency reports

Ma'an—The southern city of Ma'an was like a ghost town on Monday, two days after police and armed forces imposed a round the clock curfew following Friday and Saturday riots in the city, which left one man dead and dozens injured.

The government has promised to lift the curfew as soon as possible, but by Wednesday, the people of Ma'an were given two hours to get food supplies. It was not clear yet when the curfew will be lifted. Meanwhile, police and army continued their search for illegal arms and suspected instigators.

Two Star reporters attempted to enter the city, 220 kilometers south of Amman, on Monday but were told to return to Amman after they were held for questioning for two hours.

The government placed the curfew on Ma'an after the shooting death of a young man during a pro-Iraqi protest last Friday gave way to riots Saturday.

On Monday security source told The Star that the curfew might last for another week. Armored vehicles with machine guns patrolled the streets of the deserted city. Schools and businesses were closed, while telephone connections remained blocked.

Soldiers went house-to-house looking for arms. Police sources said inspection covered 60 percent of the city. Police said it had seized anti-tank missile, machine

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Annan's accord is spare on details, US says

'Desert Thunder' asunder

By R. Jeffrey Smith
and agency reports

SENIOR US officials of the Clinton administration were uneasy last week when United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan decided to become personally involved in the crisis over Iraq's obstruction of UN inspections. Would he wind up negotiating away key prerogatives of the existing inspectors, who work for the Special Commission on Iraq? Since Annan returned from Baghdad on Monday with an agreement creating a new inspection system, the administration has taken pains to avoid being seen as a skunk at the garden party by criticizing a deal that staved off military strikes. But officials have said they still have key concerns about what the accord means and how it might affect future inspections.

Their concerns center on a provision in Annan's agreement with Iraq that establishes a new organization to conduct inspections of particularly sensitive sites, a responsibility held by the UN Special Commission on Iraq since 1991. If this new group conducts robust inspections and gains satisfactory access to these sites, then US officials say they are willing to support its new authority, and their concerns about Annan's involvement will dissipate. But other officials say they remain concerned that the new group may wind up

being less aggressive than the existing one, or more subject to political pressure from Iraq and its supporters. In that case, they said, Annan's deal will have seriously undermined the UN's task of ridding Iraq of any remaining weapons of mass destruction. Some of the tensions between the UN and the administration were manifested Tuesday in a quiet but vigorous discussion about how rapidly a team of UN inspectors should be dispatched to test Iraq's reaffirmation that it will accept wide-ranging inspections of suspicious sites. Washington and several of its allies were pressing for a sensitive inspection to begin within a matter of days, according to two officials, while Annan was urging that remaining inspection issues be clarified and worked out before another inspection occurs.

In addition to the uncertainties about how inspections will be conducted by the new group, the number of sites subject to its jurisdiction remains unclear—with estimates ranging from slightly over 1,000 buildings to around 1,500. Nor has Annan specified whether and how the new group will be connected to the existing commission, which Washington has generally supported but Iraq has bitterly criticized. US officials said it is now clear that Annan's deal does not comply with at least one of the guidelines he was

given by the five permanent members of the Security Council before setting out for Baghdad. That guideline specified that the new inspection group should have jurisdiction only over presidential residences in Iraq, not surrounding buildings. The idea was to avoid usurping too much inspection authority from the existing commission. But Annan told the Security Council Tuesday that he did not follow this guideline because a special UN survey had revealed that Iraq really only has a single presidential residence, located in Baghdad, and that Iraq considers many other sites and buildings associated with guest houses elsewhere in the country just as sensitive.

Several sources also said that Annan's deal violated a second guideline he was given by the Security Council's permanent members: that the special group should be clearly under the operational control of the existing inspection commission and its chairman, the outspoken Australian diplomat Richard Butler.

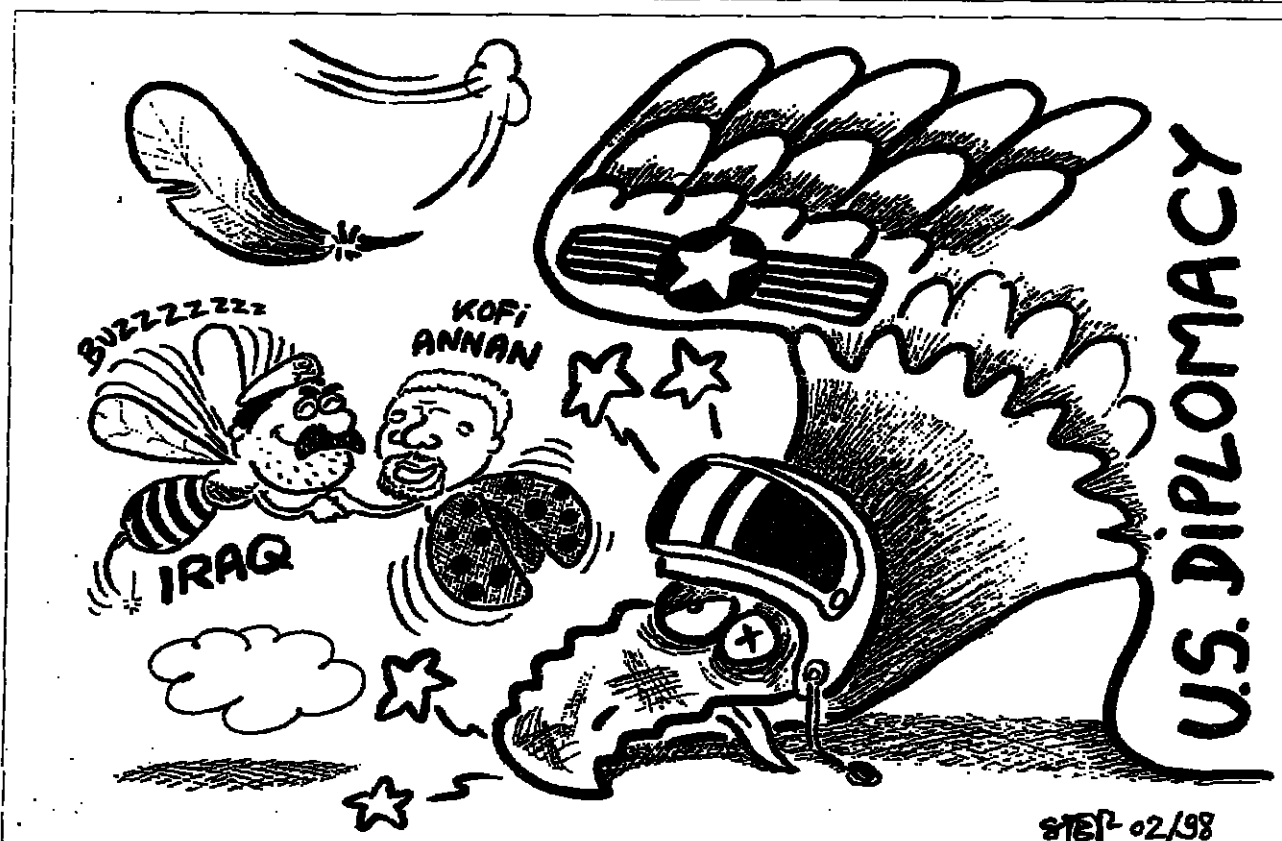
Instead, the deal handed the authority to pick the membership and chairman of the new inspection group to Annan. It also made the new group responsible for writing its own reports, which would then be passed along to the Security Council by Butler. Some US officials and supporters of the existing com-

mission said they were worried about this arrangement because of Annan's open sympathy for some of Iraq's criticisms of the commission's past activities.

In his remarks Tuesday to the Security Council, for example, Annan astonished several listeners by describing inspectors for the existing commission as "cowboys" who had thrown their weight around and behaved irresponsibly. Annan passed along without comment an Iraqi complaint—denied by the commission—as a paranoid delusion—that some of the most aggressive UN inspectors were seeking to hunt down Iraqi president Saddam Hussein so he could be assassinated, according to officials privy to his comments.

If Annan is so skeptical about the merits of past inspections, several officials speculated Tuesday, he is unlikely to appoint an aggressive inspector as the head of the new group. And the significance of his selection becomes all that much greater if the number of buildings subject to the inspections is large and the procedures for conducting those inspections are weak. "This is," said one diplomat, "the beginning of the unraveling of the inspection process." That view was challenged, however, by several other officials, who said they hope the rules for new inspections can still be written.

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STEP 02/98

Judge Kilani says minister of justice is behind his removal

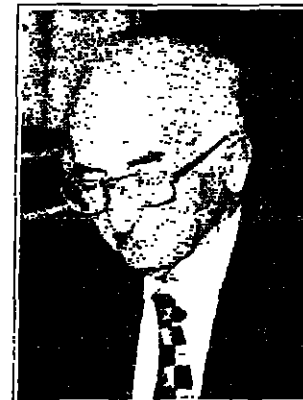
AMMAN (Star)—Outgoing President of the Judicial Council and the Court of Cassation Judge Farouq Kilani has launched a direct attack against Minister of Justice Riad Al Shaka'a accusing him of interference in the independence of the judicial branch and of influencing the council's authority.

Judge Kilani was served notice by members of the Judicial Council this week informing him of the council's unanimous decision to retire him immediately after less than three months in office.

In an interview with The Star, Judge Kilani said the main reason behind this unprecedented decision was "the government's disbelief in the independence of the judiciary." He said the minister of justice "wanted to interfere in judicial appointments and he gave directives in a number of cases, but I stood firmly against such interference."

Judge Kilani said the government was unhappy with the latest High Court rulings, in particular the historic verdict on the temporary press and publication law, which the court rejected as unconstitutional.

He said the Jordanian constitution guarantees the independence of the judicial branch



Kilani

and accordingly judges should be able to rule according to the law and their conscience without fear of retribution. "The law is the refuge for those who are seeking justice; it is part of human existence and international conscience," Judge Kilani, who was appointed as Chief of the High Court of Justice last August, said.

He added that his forced retirement proves that the judicial system is a target of executive interference and "this cannot be accepted or else people's rights will be at risk."

Judge Kilani said such interference was occurring on

almost daily basis. "Any denial of this is simply untrue," he added. He said at present the minister of justice alone has the right to recommend appointment of judges and their retirement. "He [the minister] recommended that I be forced to retire so the government's denial that it had nothing to do with my forced retirement is false. The minister's letter to the council is a form of interference."

Judge Kilani said the minister had announced recently in the Lower House that "Farouq Kilani is leaving." He said Mr Shaka'a interfered on a number of times in cases being reviewed by courts.

Judge Kilani denied allegations that he had written the text of the High Court ruling on the unconstitutionality of the temporary press and publication law. "This is untrue. The verdict was issued by the High Court of Justice and was signed by the panel of judges and was issued when I was in London, two months after I had left the presidency of that court," he said. "But when I was head of that court my opinion was that the law was unconstitutional and I had written a memo to that effect."

Judge Kilani defended that ruling and said it boosted Jordan's integrity in international forums and reinvigorated democracy.

Judge Kilani, who was promoted to the presidency of the Higher Judicial Council and the Court of Cassation last December, was working on introducing wide-ranging judicial reforms. He said His Majesty King Hussein had approved a plan submitted by Judge Kilani to carry out these reforms. "But the minister of justice did not want to execute these reforms because it was alleged that they aimed at limiting government control and removing enemies of the president of the Judicial Council," he said. "These allegations are incorrect because they mean that the government relies on questionable people and this cannot be. A strong government must rely on a judicial system that enjoys integrity." ■

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Sanctions are in the center of UN-Iraq crisis

By Nicholas Goldberg

THERE IS an entire ward of lethargic, malnourished babies in the Saddam Children's Hospital in Baghdad, most of whom are expected to die soon, according to doctors. A few blocks away, an auction house is selling off the furniture of those who no longer can afford it. On the streets, Iraqi doctors and lawyers peddle cigarettes to supplement their incomes, and women hock their wedding rings. Prostitution, mental illness and crime are said to be on the rise.

"How are we supposed to survive?" asked one woman in a small neighborhood on the outskirts of Baghdad during an interview several months ago. "Why are they doing this to us?" The collapse of the once-wealthy nation is the result largely of one thing: the toughest economic sanctions ever imposed. Enacted by the United Nations after the Gulf

War in 1991, the sanctions are designed to keep pressure on the Iraqi government to comply with ongoing UN demands. They bar Iraq from importing or exporting most goods, and from selling all but a token amount of oil—and they are not to be lifted until the UN Security Council is satisfied, among other things, that Iraq's biological and chemical weapons have been found and destroyed.

As an outcome of the latest deal between Iraq and the UN, signed in Baghdad by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the subject of sanctions is once again being broached. Are the Iraqi people suffering too much, while the country's leadership remains insulated? Can Saddam Hussein realistically be expected to comply with UN weapons inspectors if he sees no hope that the sanctions will ever be lifted?

The French, Russians, Chinese and the entire Arab world have made clear their belief that the Iraqi regime should at least see the possibility of leniency in the future,

but America's position suggests that sanctions may not be removed until the regime in Baghdad has been toppled. "We do not agree with the nations who argue that if Iraq complies with its obligations concerning weapons of mass destruction, sanctions should be lifted," said Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in a speech at Georgetown University last year. "Our view, which is unshakable, is that Iraq must prove its peaceful intentions. Is it possible to conceive of such a government under Saddam Hussein? The evidence is overwhelming that Saddam Hussein's intentions will never be peaceful."

Despite such strong words, the sanctions policy never has been fully satisfying to anyone. For Iraq, it has been an unqualified disaster. Sanctions have devastated the national infrastructure. They've cost the country more than \$100 billion in oil sales. There's been a staggering increase in such misery indicators as infant mortality and child malnutrition. The average salary of a govern-

ment employee has dropped to \$3 a month. But from the US perspective, sanctions have not been a particular success, either. They've failed, so far, to topple—or even destabilize—the regime.

They've impoverished Iraq and weakened Saddam militarily, but they haven't cut into his own lavish lifestyle noticeably. What's more, they've led the Arab world and much of Europe to blame the United States for starving 22 million Iraqi people.

In a long-standing global propaganda war, Iraq and the United States each have sought to blame the other for the suffering. While Saddam charges the United States with starving his people, President Clinton argues that the fault lies with the Iraqi dictator himself, for lying and concealing his dangerous weapons. "No people have suffered more at the hands of Saddam Hussein than the Iraqi people themselves," Clinton said Friday. "Because of Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with UN resolutions, the sanctions

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King Hussein in a televised interview 'We have no political ambitions in Iraq or anywhere else'

AMMAN (Star)—His Majesty King Hussein affirmed that following the last Iraqi positive stand regarding the acceptance of the UN General Secretary proposals matters should be moved to a new stage that is a stage of American Iraqi dialogue.

"We hope that we will be successful in convincing both concerned sides to initiate this dialogue as soon as possible," His Majesty said in a TV interview transmitted by the Jordanian TV and Orbit Network Tuesday. "Because it is the sole way to avert any collisions in the future, and it gives us a clear vision for the future prospects regarding Iraq's full implementation of what was agreed upon with the Security Council," then, the King continued, "this should be accompanied by initiating work for lifting the Iraqi people's suffering caused by the sanctions."

Responding to a question regarding the US hegemony on the world His Majesty said "This is unacceptable from my point of view... In our dialogue with the US we always say we may agree or disagree," he added that if we want to remain in good terms we have to accept this principle... "and our friends should understand that we have our own opinion and our own stand regarding our interests and the interests of this region and the Arab world."

"I believe that the strike of the 1990 had broken our backs, and it had consequences that went beyond the limited boundaries of the battle," the King said. "We had not been with or against, but we had an opinion and fears regarding the future in this region. And I had a feeling that we were going to lose... this was the real situation."

His Majesty stressed that Jordan considers peace as the goal towards development. "The role of Jordan is the supporter and the country to which the Palestinians rely in their demand for their national soil."

The King hoped that a situation will occur in which the world would look to the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian rights on the Palestinian soil, and to the issues of Syrian occupied lands and the Lebanese lands, adding that "these are the bases on which peace can be built on."

His Majesty commented on the possibility of achieving this under the light of the Likud saying that "without achieving this there would be no outcome and there will not be a genuine peace."

Again on the Iraqi issue, He pointed out that Secretary General Annan contacted him following the press conference in Baghdad and thanked His Majesty for his efforts to bring the concerned parties views closer to achieve this

solution. "I think that the Secretary General rejected to go to Baghdad unless attaining the agreement of the Security Council's five members and having an authorization to move in a certain framework," His Majesty said.

Responding to a question regarding the possibility of holding a meeting between the Iraqi President and the American President or

should he dealt with, that is, the issue of the Iraqi people's suffering and maintaining Iraq's integrity and sovereignty," the King said.

In response to a question about if the US will accept that President Saddam remains in power and the possibility of dialogue with him, the King said "I believe that dialogue should be conducted with him since he represents

attempt to open dialogue between the Iraqi and American governments took place due to what the Iraqi leadership was repeatedly asking. "When the Iraqis take some decisions relevant to the future of the region we have the right to discuss them," His Majesty said.

The King denied allegations that Jordan had political ambitions in Iraq. "There are no ambitions at all, neither in Iraq nor in anywhere," His Majesty said. "There is no kingdom in Baghdad and no domination on Jerusalem," the King clarified.

In response to a question regarding Israeli allegations that the Palestinian National Authority is incapable of fulfilling security in the Palestinian territories, and demanding that Jordan should supervise security there, His Majesty affirmed Jordan's rejection to this role.

"The Palestinian side shoulders the responsibility regarding the Palestinian future and right on the Palestinian soil... and we have to fully support them," His Majesty said.

The King added "that when we talk about chemical weapons there are a lot of questions that should be put... how to eliminate for good such poisonous materials, how to eliminate mass destruction weapons from the entire region within a framework of peace and a stability..."

'...when we talk about chemical weapons there are a lot of questions that should be put... how to eliminate for good such poisonous materials, how to eliminate mass destruction weapons from the entire region within a framework of peace and a stability...'

between officials in both leaderships. His Majesty said "Without such a meeting the march will be stopped."

the regime in Baghdad. However, the future is left to the Iraqi people to decide. It should not be decided by any outside power."

The King clarified that his



JORDANIAN PAPERS

By Marwan Al Asmar

The soothing touch An Islamist in government

AT LAST Prime Minister Abdel Salam Al Majali reshuffled his cabinet putting an end to rumors and speculations. The Prime Minister surprised many, both by the form of the reshuffle and by the substance and distinct political color that he tried to add by appointing Dr Bassam Al Ummouh, a former Islamic deputy, who was expelled last year from the Islamic Action Front.

Although the eventual reshuffle has come about partly because of the regional situation, his appointment as Minister of Administrative Development, a post that usually carries little political value, is aimed at two basic issues: to drive a wedge into the Islamic movement and to dampen the rising popular tension and frustration because of the potential American air strikes on Iraq.

While the reshuffle involved six ministers, three of whom served in the first Majali government of 1993, it is the appointment of such a prominent Islamist that is causing the most excitement.

Observers say the appointment of the former IAF deputy would be seen as an attempt to split the opposition, especially with regard to the age-old issue of joining governments. Could other moderate Islamists now come out and make their positions known?

However, it may be that Al Ummouh's appointment is a mere personal gesture aimed at rewarding a moderate Islamist who stood against his own party and participated in the 1997 November.

A long-time member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Ummouh has always been regarded as a pragmatic politician who has consistently adopted a moderate line vis-à-vis the major issues of the day.

Al Ummouh did not contest the last elections, but he supported those who did and allied himself with deputy Abdullah Akaleh, another Islamist who broke ranks with his party and won a seat in the Lower House.

But Al Ummouh's appointment remains an interesting development, probably the most interesting about the whole reshuffle.

Regarded as a dove, but by no means a lightweight, he belongs to a school of thought in the Islamic movement which strongly believes not only in the democratic process, but in fully participating in the highest branch of government.

He has always tried to lead a middle course in the Islamic movement and previously the Islamic Action Front, trying always to avoid controversy. However, his expulsion from the movement, has given him extra leeway to put his thoughts and beliefs into practice. In this respect, Al Ummouh must be regarded as one of those Islamic politicians who believe in the necessity of taking the reins of government from within the existing order.

On the other hand, this could be a source of worry for the Prime Minister, who sees a prize to be had from the appointment of the Islamic politician. Some political observers argue that Majali has a different agenda.

Although out of Parliament, Al Ummouh continues to be a respectable politician with a wide constituency base not only among his former electoral district, but all over the country. In this troubled times, Al Ummouh does still have political clout and could serve as a soothing factor to bring the country through the present crisis.

And in this respect, Al Ummouh is already cutting corners and making potential U-turns. On the eve of the government he told a Gulf newspaper that "democracy which we speak of should not be isolated from the law, and disorganized rallies are no more than street action; and because of the difficult regional situation, nobody can just demonstrate... even in advanced countries, a permission is required before a demonstration takes place." Now that's a new line that we haven't heard yet.

'Desert Thunder' asunder

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ten to allow an even tougher approach than the commission has taken in the past.

Whether Amman will support that remains to be seen. At another point during the closed security council meeting Tuesday, Annan said he returned from Iraq convinced that the existing commission is in need of political supervision, according to four sources. He said he planned to appoint a special representative for Iraq who will advise him on UN policy toward that country. He indicated that his appointee may be someone who in the past has expressed concern about the effects of sanctions on Iraq's people, an Algerian diplomat named Lakhdar Brahimi.

In terms sharply at odds with the US view of the Iraqi president, Annan gave particular credit to Saddam Hussein. "The president was very well-informed and was in full control of the facts. I was grateful to him that we were frank, constructive and at the end were determined to settle this issue diplomatically," he said prior to leaving Baghdad. "There are ambiguities... The proof will come in the course of time," said one senior US official, who sought to downplay the importance of the text of the deal. "This isn't about a piece of paper."



You have to watch and wait" to see what happens during the inspections. Another official said "what we are looking for is how he implements this agreement."

The showdown with Iraq demonstrates that America's support from its Gulf allies has shrunk since the 1991 war and suggests the United States may need a new battle plan for any renewed face-off with Iraqi President Saddam

Hussein, US analysts say. Although Pentagon officials contend that they had all the military assistance they required in the latest confrontation, neither Saudi Arabia nor Turkey agreed to let warplanes fly from their bases. Even Bahrain, where American B-1B bombers are based, showed last-minute ambivalence about the mission. Taken together, these reactions showed a sharp decline

of support in the seven years since the United States led a coalition of nations against Saddam Hussein. US experts say. And they suggest that the United States should be prepared to lean more heavily on carrier-based warplanes and long-range bombers—and less on aircraft flying from nearby land bases—if there is another confrontation, as many officials expect.

Sanctions are in the center of UN-Iraq crisis

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imposed by the UN at the end of the Gulf war to stop him from rebuilding his military might are still in place. As a result, the people of Iraq have suffered.

In an effort to ease the suffering, the United States has long supported what is known as "food-for-oil," a plan under which Iraq is allowed to sell a limited amount of oil and use the proceeds to buy food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies. This week, for example—just in advance of Annan's arrival in Baghdad—the Security Council approved an increase in the annual amount from \$2 billion to \$5.2 billion.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



Army tanks, become the common scene in Ma'an

Ma'an still under curfew after two-day riots

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guns, hunting guns, pistols and huge cache of ammunition. However, police is still looking for 500mm machine gun which was used by one of the demonstrators during the Friday events.

The Star's team, which was well-treated by police and army officials, was escorted to police headquarters in Ma'an before being escorted out of the city limits.

His Majesty the King toured the city on Saturday and made sure that all precautions have been taken to preserve security in the city. He condemned irresponsible acts that led to the death of one man. During the clashes, the government said eight policemen were injured.

Sitting on the main highway to Aqaba and the Saudi borders, Ma'an, a city of 20,000, has been hard hit by unemployment, which is estimated at 40 percent. Many of its residents work as drivers hauling goods to and from the port of Aqaba.

Last week's events came in the wake of heightened tension after police, using clubs and attack dogs, broke up a march outside Al Hussein Mosque in downtown Amman following Friday prayers.

But last Thursday, the government said Leith Shubellat, a leading dissident, traveled to Ma'an and urged people to demonstrate after Friday prayers. Several hundred protesters began marching from the main mosque and were almost immediately set upon by police, witnesses said.

Tear gas was fired from the rooftops of government buildings, and rifle fire rang out. Mohammad Khatib, 22, a demonstrator—some say he was a passerby—was shot in the back. As word spread, much of

the town erupted in protests that lasted until nightfall. The government said protesters shot Khatib, whose body was exhumed on Monday and the coroner reported that his fatal wounds were caused by a non-police issue firearm. It verified that the late Khatib was hit by a single 7mm calibre bullet penetrating his liver and heart.

Police intercepted Shubellat en route to Amman and arrested him on charges of inciting a riot and lese majeste.

The next afternoon, about 2,000 mourners went to retrieve Khatib's body from a hospital. They stormed into the hospital, carried the shrouded body outside on a stretcher and marched in the city's streets. Police fired tear gas, and the mourners turned into a mob, burning a Housing Bank branch, an Education Ministry building and some electrical installations. Some protesters produced hunting weapons, and fistfights broke out. The crowd chanted pro-Iraqi slogans.

As a result, the Army was called in to support. Public Security units and curfew was imposed. During the night, as the town quieted, soldiers ringed Ma'an and began searching for weapons.

During his visit to Ma'an on Saturday, King Hussein spoke to the governor and addressed soldiers saying that "Everyone who tries to stir trouble and riots in this country is contributing to the implementation of conspiracies."

In 1989 riots erupted in Ma'an after the government raised prices and as a result the country entered the democratic era. And in August 1996, Ma'an was one of a number of southern cities that witnessed what became known as the bread riots.

Actors celebrate, demand legal reforms

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exploited the law to justify their goals. "We respect the law but it shouldn't be used as a sword over our necks since it can be amended by considering exceptional cases," the famous actor continued.

Ahu Ghareeb pointed out that he is optimistic that some considerations will be taken. "Some members of the JAA's council whom I met were very understanding."

"Originally, the whole process should have been studied more carefully but now we are

waiting the elected members to take the next step," the actor said.

The Royal Decree to establish the JAA was issued in March 1997, while elections took place last Friday.

Singer Malek Madi won the post of the first president of the JAA. Madi and an 11-member council will now run the association.

"In order to have our own association we accepted the law as it is in spite of the gaps in some articles but we will do our best to make some

amendments," Madi said. "Ten percent or less from the general assembly did not vote since they are not considered members according to the law. The number of actors who comply with the law is 411."

Madi, who graduated from the Music College in Cairo in 1974, pointed out that they need time to achieve all their demands and have some articles amended through legal means.

President of JAA talked about some important privileges which the members will

obtain. "We will protect Jordanian artists and provide them a respectable standard of living, so we will work on the retirement system and also the health insurance."

Actors, musicians, and directors, all members of the JAA, are still celebrating and receiving congratulations. Famous Jordanian actor Ali Abd Al Aziz expressed his pleasure although his membership was denied because of article 6. "I congratulate my friends for this victory and wish them luck in overcoming

challenges," said Abd Al Aziz, an actor with 30 years of experience.

"We have no personal demands. All we ask for is to be recognized as members in the new association," Abd Al Aziz said.

"Our mission in the new council is to find a mechanism to solve this dilemma through preparing a draft law," said Hani Al Jarrah, a director and member of the new council. "There are other articles that need amending, so our duty now is to redraft these articles in a more civilized ways," Al Jarrah added.

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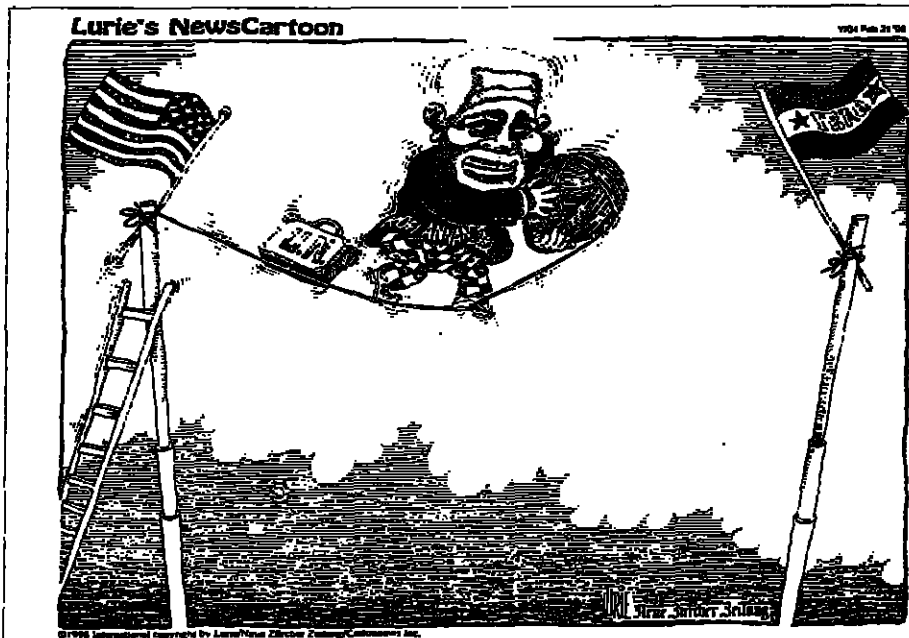
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Our Say...

Gun diplomacy fails

IT IS probably fair to say that this week's diplomatic triumph by both Iraq and the United Nations in agreeing to overcome the latest crisis over UN inspections of Iraqi presidential palaces, also means a severe set-back to US foreign policy in the region.

Between the two US policy failures concerning the Middle East: the Middle East peace process and dealing with Saddam's Iraq, the United States now finds itself isolated, criticized and admonished. While shuttle diplomacy has failed to convince Benjamin Netanyahu of the virtue of honoring Israel's commitments to the Palestinians, gun diplomacy and saber rattling cannot be credited for producing the deal that Kofi Annan was able to take with him from Baghdad this week.

Cowboy tactics cannot be credited because we have seen in the last few weeks, the US could not justify military strikes against Iraq to its own allies and perhaps to its own people. The United States wanted to make the presidential sites the core of the latest crisis while for Iraq and the rest of the world the essence of the crisis was the removal of brutal UN sanctions, imposed on the Iraqi people for the last seven years, once UNSCOM completes its mission.

If cool-headed and objective diplomacy was able to save the day in Baghdad then there is every reason to believe that it will also succeed in ending Iraq's seclusion and removing the punitive measures heaped against it. This is why the diplomatic triumph of this week was not celebrated by Iraq alone but by the whole world as well. Credibility was not only restored to the UN's treatment of Iraq, but it now opens the way for a much credible role for the world body in dealing with other Middle East issues.

It is essential to note that US failure in its Middle East policy cannot be separated from the deliberate isolation of the United Nations from the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict; the Palestinian issue. Whether it is Iraq or Palestine, the United States double-faced approach is miserable to say the least. With US aircraft carriers still moored off the Gulf coasts, threatening to strike at Iraq at a moment's notice, we have to ask about US resolve regarding Netanyahu's arrogant policies and Israel's flagrant violations of UN laws and resolutions. Will these aircraft carriers blockade Israeli ports if the Israeli leadership continues to challenge the will of the international community?

We all no the answer to this question by now. But since the US will not use force against Israel to respect international laws and UN resolutions, it can at least review its Middle East policy to make it more balanced and even-handed. It cannot go on using the international community as a shield to serve its own interests.

The events of the past few weeks have uncovered an ugly side to American foreign policy in regard to the Middle East. It would be wrong to ignore the lessons of this US debacle. Gun diplomacy is a dead end road as the US has found out to its displeasure.



UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan shakes hand with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein before their meeting in Baghdad Sunday.

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The struggle for Iraq

By Christian Doumit

THE IRAQI regime has concluded quite some time ago (about May 1997 to be precise) that there is nothing to gain from co-operating with the UN inspection teams. The leadership, under President Saddam Hussein, believes that no matter what is done to fulfil UN resolutions, the US and Britain intend to keep the sanctions in place until the regime collapses.

France, Russia and China who were part of the Gulf War coalition in 1991 to evict Iraqi troops from Kuwait, are now opposed to military action by the US and Britain against Iraq. The view from Baghdad is that Iraq's firm position against UNSCOM is based on its assessment that, contrary to what American officials say, it is the US and Britain which stand isolated on the question of sanctions.

Accordingly, each of France, Russia and China has agreed to send more experts on UN inspection teams in order to balance its membership, which is at present heavily in favor of Anglo-Saxon countries, i.e. the US, Britain, Canada, and Australia. France and Russia have also suggested closing the nuclear file on Iraq and partially lifting sanctions as a way out of the current deadlock. In addition, other EU members other than Britain are uncomfortable with the American position that the sanctions should remain until Saddam is ousted, which is an objective that goes well beyond the Gulf crisis resolutions.

If one delves deeper into the US/Britain vs Iraq dispute and the split among members of the UN Security Council, it would become apparent that this is a conflict over the future control of Iraqi oil resources. This could turn out to be a zero-sum game between the US and Britain on the one hand, and France, Russia and China, on the other.

Let us pause for a moment and take a close look at Iraq's hydrocarbon resources. Historically, Iraq's proven oil and gas reserves have been grossly conservative. Iraqi oil ministry officials now claim the Iraq Petroleum Co. (IPC) before it was nationalized—which was made up of BP, Shell, CFP, TOTAL, Exxon, and Mobil—kept reserve figures low in order for successive governments in Baghdad not to press for higher oil production levels as this would attract competitive

bids from other foreign companies.

Although developments in Iraq have been on hold due to UN sanctions, the country's huge resource base will lead to oil production being the biggest in the world. While current proven recoverable oil reserves in Iraq are stated officially at 112 billion barrels, recent exploration activity suggests that total potential oil reserves could amount to between 350-400 billion barrels.

This is larger than the stated reserves in Saudi Arabia which are 250 billion barrels. According to *Oil Market Trends*, the distribution of proven reserves is that 76% are found in Cretaceous, 23.9% in Tertiary, and only 0.1% in the Jurassic and Triassic. This abnormally low percentage of oil reserves in the Jurassic and Triassic formation is due to the limited number of exploration wells that penetrated those depths and not because of lack of oil. Recent deep drilling has confirmed the presence of light crude oil in deeper formations. Iraq's proven natural gas reserves were estimated in 1997 at 3.36 TCM.

The great bulk of Iraq's natural gas reserves is associated with crude oil reserves and most of the gas reserves are found in tertiary reservoirs. More recently, gas has been discovered in the Western Desert in sandstone of Ordovician age. This is the tip of the iceberg as Iraq has several non-associated gas/condensate fields in the North, Mansuriya in the middle, as well as in the Western Desert. The natural gas potential of Iraq can be substantial, particularly when more drilling is carried out in the Palaeozoic basement which has not been properly studied.

Unlike the GCC countries which have refused to grant US major Production Sharing Agreements (PSA's), Iraq has offered PSA's to foreign oil companies to comprise fields already appraised or partly developed.

The most important fields offered by the government have been reserved for companies from France, Russia, and China—three of the UN Security Council's five permanent members. Thus the huge Majnoon and Nahr Umr fields are reserved for ELF Aquitaine

and Total of France. The second phase of West Qurna has been awarded to a Russian consortium led by Lukoil, while Al Ahad has been offered to the China National Petroleum Corporation.

The Majnoon field is a partly developed "super giant" with more than 30 billion barrels of oil in place, most of which would be recoverable. As mentioned earlier, this has



been reserved to ELF Aquitaine under a PSA for which a letter of intent has been signed. Nahr Umr, which is also part of the "Great Rumaila Triangle" has been reserved for Total who has also signed a letter of intent for a PSA, under which Nahr Umr would be developed quickly.

Work on both Majnoon and Nahr Umr is to start as soon as UN sanctions are lifted. Majnoon could potentially be three to four times the size of the North Sea, including the UK and Norwegian sectors. Together with Nahr Umr this would push the two French companies to the top four or five crude-long majors in the next century.

Mobil and Exxon—once members of the IPC Consortium—which until May 1972 was the sole concessionaire in Iraq, want to rejoin together with other US majors. But, they are barred from Iraq by the US Administration, the latter using the oil weapon in a way that has caused US majors great loss in Libya as well as in Iran and Iraq.

France has already begun challenging the US in Iran, where Total is developing the Sirri oil-fields and is to develop the second phase of the South Pars gas field. South Pars will help make Total the second biggest gas producer among the majors in the next century.

Russia has a geo-strategic partnership with Iran, mainly against US-Turkish control over Central Asia, and is

working on a similar partnership with Iraq to restore what had been build there by the former Soviet Union (this is behind Yeltsin's warning to the Americans that a military strike against Iraq could trigger a Third World War, in addition to Russian officials citing "national interest" to Defense Secretary William Cohen in opposing such a strike). And China, which will depend heavily on Middle Eastern oil in the next decade, has begun to increase its military, political and economic presence in this region.

With their vital interests at stake, the following questions come to mind. Will the US fleet shoot at a French tanker, a Russian tanker, or a Chinese tanker loading Iraqi oil which is beyond the oil-for-food deal? Will the US shoot down planes flying to and from Iraq, or at foreign companies developing Iraqi oil fields? Strategists in the US think none of these powers (France, Russia and China) would dare challenge American control over Iraq unilaterally or jointly.

France, Russia, and China stand to gain most from an alliance between Iran, Iraq and Syria—keys to both the Arab and Muslim world—and in efforts to topple the regime in Baghdad by force. Conversely, these three countries stand to be the clear losers in the event of a new regime being installed in Baghdad. Such a regime could renege on international agreements and declare the oil concessions to France, Russia and China—made by the current leadership, null and void.

Christian Doumit is an energy analyst living in Amman. He is a regular speaker at international energy conferences.

Letters to the Editor

Is that justice?

To the editor,

The "confrontation between the United States (and Britain) and Iraq raises several questions. First, does the US have a right to act unilaterally if some members of the United Nations Security Council are opposed to the war? After all, the US is basing much of its arguments for bombing Iraq on the grounds that UN agreements have been violated.

Notably, Russia and France are both seeking a diplomatic solution and backing the efforts of Secretary General Kofi Annan. Second, I would like to suggest a counter-argument that American realists fail to consider. Is it rational for the US to ask that the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) team be allowed total access, "wherever and whenever" they want? The national security of Iraq is held and protected in those presidential palaces. Any reasonable country would object to a situation where its top secrets are in jeopardy.

An additional problem for American realists is purely academic. Is it rational to personalize the war? Is the war Bill versus Saddam, or is it the USA versus Iraq? Stop blaming one man for the foreign policy failures of the United States.

Third, the US has squelched the voice of the people. Some Americans outright oppose the war against Iraq. There have been significant protests in every city supported by a good deal of news coverage by smaller papers and local television programs. Still, Clinton and his Pentagon officials have not listened to the voice of Americans. Sadly this reflects another reality. Americans are largely indifferent, caring little about the fate that many innocent Iraqis will face in the coming weeks.

In my experience as an immigrant living in America I have learned that Americans

have a deeply ingrained disposition towards punishment. They use the "carrot and the stick" and then they whip the mule anyway. They are fanatically obsessed with the term "justice", yet never offer a definition for it; they say that they are "seeking justice against Saddam Hussein", but leave the Iraqi people strangely out of their calculations. It seems to me that what America really wants is revenge, and with revenge, control of affairs in the Middle East.

I ask the readers of *The Star*—is that justice?

Michael de Yoanna
journalist and student
USA.

Keep up the good work!

To the editor,

I truly enjoy reading your internet version of *The Star*. I am a resident of Phoenix, Arizona, in the US, and enjoy the perspective provided by your publication. I also spend considerable time looking at other sites, Central Europe On-Line, Washington, Jerusalem Post Daily, London Times (the best), plus a number of others. I find that the differences in coverage and content of the various publications very interesting.

I particularly enjoy your coverage of Jordanian social issues, and would really like to see more articles in this area. Another area of interest is in sports, which certainly is useful in showing the unity of the human race.

I am a student of history, mostly ancient (Roman, Greek, Middle East), World War II and the Holocaust, and American constitutional development. With this background, I have what I consider to be a unique perspective on the issues affecting the Middle East.

In one article I saw the phrase "international Jewry". I would recommend that this be avoided, as this is the term that was used by the Nazi defendants at the 1945-46 Nuremberg trials to justify their actions. It does not so much identify a group of people, but implies a specific attitude towards

these people. And frankly, this group does not exist. I have many Jewish and Islamic friends who share none of the views attributed to these "groups".

Please keep up the good work, and keep this source of information available.

Bill Nelson
Phoenix AZ
USA

Bravo Christian!

To the Editor

Bravo Christian Doumit and *The Star* for the weekly column "Scrapbook" in which a refreshing discourse recalls the writer's connections between politics, sexual scandals, and his own experience in a lyrical view which never fails to amuse. His recent articles "Age shall not wither" (*The Star* 22 January) and "In praise of older women" (*The Star* 12 February) are quite spicy. Men choose younger women as lovers but they wouldn't dream of marrying older women—at least not in this part of the world. I can't understand why. Older women with younger men such as Elisabeth Taylor



Camilla Parker Bowles have proved their pull, and kept it for decades, simply by being alluring. A marriage of heart and mind needs no impediment such as age, religion, or race.

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Middle East East by Khairi Jamrah Easing out Rifa'at

IN A recent change of heart, President Assad eased out his brother Rifa'at from the position of deputy president. The name of Mr Rifa'at Al Assad is not exactly obscure in the region, nor on the international arena. He had played an instrumental role in supporting the regime in Syria, in the late 70s, and early 80s, but the threat of a head-on collision with his brother the president, in the mid 80s, had led to his first exile in Europe.

His first unceremonious exit, unceremonious return, and exit again from public and political life in Syria, explains the nature of the power structure inside the country. It is noteworthy to indicate that Mr Rifa'at Al Assad holds a high military rank in the Syrian army, and the only one as such among the other two deputy presidents.

Since the main arbiter in Syria Ba'ath politics has become the army, as the established pattern set up by President Assad's advent to power, the only logical candidate for the presidency would be Mr Rifa'at, especially after the accidental and premature death of Major Basil Al Assad. From this logic, while staying out of the public eye, and trouble spots, Rifa'at's path to the leadership transition seemed natural and uneventful.

But the recent decree to ease him out from this sensitive position, has created plenty of rumors and speculation.

A seemingly straightforward succession, became a much troubled affair, especially when it is evident that President Assad is an excellent planner, and not given to rash decisions. This must have been on his mind for some time. One would imagine that, the cosmopolitan lifestyle, and the contacts that Mr Rifa'at had developed during his stay in Europe, has opened his eyes and mind to many opportunities and various scenarios, that would have been inaccessible otherwise.

Being known as the second man in Syria, and the brother of President Assad, must have exposed him to many Middle East planners, strategists, and dabblers in Arab politics. Therefore, one may conclude, that his stay in Europe may have influenced his political orientation, and philosophical outlook, to an unacceptable level in Syrian politics.

One recalls that the Arab publication published by him in Paris was much sympathetic in tone towards Iraq and President Saddam during the 1991 Gulf conflict, when Syria was actually an effective partner in the military coalition against Iraq. At that point, Mr Rifa'at was developing his own political path, which was becoming more divergent from that of the Syrian leadership. His subsequent return to Syria, and his appointment as a deputy President, had in effect put plenty of pressure on him to be more silent, and become part of the crowd that follows the policies initiated by President Assad. Nevertheless, this fact could not change his political orientation, but there was not much he could do about it.

All what was left for him to do, is to preserve himself in good mental and physical health, until the time comes, and he assumes power in his country, and perhaps, take it then into a different path, than that of his brother. Hence, one assumes that it was this particular issue which had started worrying President Assad, and this point must have been nagging at him for some time. It seems he is determined that his legacy, and Syria's political path must not change even after his death, and it is those closest to him who will follow the same pattern of policies, long after him, seem to be groomed for the next presidency. Mr Rifa'at must have seemed as the weakest link in the future command in Syria, as the influences which he may have been averse towards, had already started worrying President Assad.

To clarify this thought, we are talking here about integration in the world economy, as well as the all important issue of peace with Israel.

Business scene

■ The Jordanian Cooperative Corp., has last year recorded a surplus of JD 100,000, compared with annual deficit estimated at JD 300,000. The surplus, which is the first to be registered by the corporation since early 1980s, has resulted from carrying out new activities mainly in the field of agriculture and raising of livestock.

■ A modernized draft law for savings and pension funds is expected to see the light soon. The draft law, which has been discussed by international and local experts over the last three months, seeks to protect depositors in such funds as well as guiding them to invest in feasible and profitable fields. There are about 80 funds in the private sector, operating at total assets estimated at JD 250 million. Being the first legislation of its kind in Jordan, the draft law plans to generate high rate of dividends for investors.

These funds are exempted from income tax or other taxes or fees.

■ Total costs of projects carried out by the Ports Authority last year reached nearly JD 300,000. This involves paving roads inside Aqaba, developing containers areas, and other housing facilities at the port of Aqaba. The authority plans to execute further projects this year, worth JD 4 million. This includes paving roads within the port area, constructing housing units for the authority's employees and maintenance projects for the port's tower. Last year, the port received 2996 vessels, including 1556 for passengers and 1445 commercial ships. The port's authority handled delivery of about 12,313,124 tons of both imports and exports. Among exports are shipments of phosphate, fertilizers, potash and various goods.

■ Volume of trading for both organized and parallel markets in Amman Financial Market (AFM) reached on Tuesday JD 1,894,053, turned over shares 1,646,053 and carried out 1340 contracts, sources of AFM said. The sectorial contribution was as follows: banks and financial companies 21.3%, insurance 0.3%, services 5.4% and industry 73.0%, the sources added. Price index in market value for today's closure reached 168.41 points, the sources concluded.

Foreign Exchange

Wednesday, 25 February

	Buy JD	Sell JD
US\$	0.7080	0.7100
£	1.1510	1.1568
DM	0.4124	0.4145
SFR	0.4801	0.4825
FRF	0.1227	0.1233
YEN (100)	0.5624	0.5652
DEU	0.3667	0.3685
LST (100)	0.0419	0.0421

Privatization will end the slump in the contracting sector, Majali argues

By Itham Sadiq
Star Staff Writer

THE CATCH phrase today is globalization in a free market economy. To reach this requires doubled efforts and embarking on certain strategies that could make such target a dream come true.

While Jordan is running the race to achieve such openness, many Jordanian firms and industrial bodies have come to realize that entering into the global marketplace and into regional alliances (for instance the EU Partnership and the World Trade Organization) puts them face to face with new challenges.

It's true that some Jordanian establishments are competent enough to face outside competition, but also it is a prerequisite to stand on a solid and sound base to live up to the latest developments and play an active role in the would-be small village by the year 2002 that has no boundaries and no restrictions.

Bearing such target in mind, the UK based SGS launched the ISO 9000 certification (International Standards Organization) and its category ISO 9001 to 9004.

In Jordan, more than 75 industrial companies have so far been awarded the ISO 9000 certification.

"Such certification gives local companies a passport to enter international markets strong enough and ready to engage into dialogue with foreign investors and contractors," says Mr. Sabeh Majali, managing director of the Mid

Contracting Co., which has been lately awarded the ISO 9002 accreditation.

The company, which is the first Jordanian contracting company to be awarded the ISO 9002 certificate, has two years ago, started procedures to become ISO certified.

"Since early 1995 we tried to systematize all operations in the company to reach our goal, we established a quality department as a requirement for the certification," engineer Majali adds.

This involved subsequent steps to document procedures in all aspects in order to

it helps local contractors to carry out joint ventures with foreign investors who are seeking highly qualified partners to run their own investment business in the country.

By getting the ISO 9002 certification, Mid Contracting is considered as one of the leading Arab contracting companies that had obtained such an accreditation and this enhances its customers' confidence.

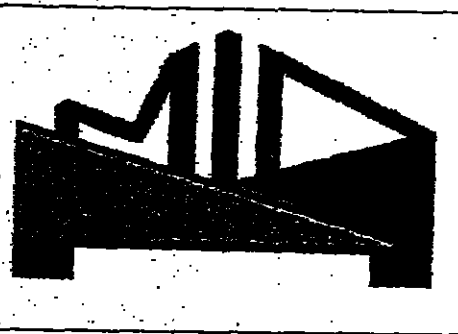
Also Majali said that it also opens new areas for improving and developing local production by implementing the latest technology used abroad.

This will certainly boost the productive capacity and enhance the size of exports in term of quantitative and qualitative levels.

In order to prepare its industrial base for getting into international blocks, the Jordanian government has for the last two years embarked on certain laws and legislations to improve the performance and competence of local products. Privatization is one of the ways of enhancing domestic production and promoting local products abroad.

Such strategy requires selling off or reducing public equity in some companies, mainly big ones, such as cement and telecommunications.

Majali disagrees with views by critics who are against privatizing profitable public companies. "I agree that these companies are generating high yield, but no one can deny the fact that the government asks them to pay income tax and imposes other financial obligations on them," Majali added.



reflect a quality assurance policy within the company.

Majali pays tribute to the support of highly skilled consulting staff from Team who worked with the company hand in hand and provided their assistance in establishing all measures required.

"Also these procedures were audited by SGS which finally awarded the company the certificate for meeting all requirements and specifications," he said.

Referring to the benefits of the ISO 9002 certification, especially in the field of contracting, Majali points out that

He elaborated that in this context privatizing these companies will be definitely more beneficial, provided that such strategy gives free access to latest technology and consequently improves production. This applies to the Cement Factories Co., which Majali said is still producing cement through means that should be enhanced.

"In Jordan, we are going through a transitional period, where our customers' base is moving from the public to the private sector," he said.

Majali added that allowing the private sector to offer "cellular" service has positively reflected on the telecommunications sector and improved its efficiency.

This is not all. The variety of mobile phones available in the market has given users a large scope of choice to select which is better and at the same time less costly.

"Since it has started operating, Fastlink, the cellular phone service provider, has created about more than 2500 new job opportunities all of which require highly skilled staff.

On the current economic recession which has hit the contracting and construction sector, Majali said it is normal to see a halt in this sector when moving from the ownership of the public sector to the ownership of the private sector. It is true that this branch of industry is facing a recession, but it will end gradually once privatization takes its natural course.

He called on contractors to be patient and wait to reap the benefits of the privatization policy. However, he appealed to the government to give Jordanian contractors a chance



Majali

to promote themselves abroad not through financial support but rather through moral backing.

"We have seen many contractors from Arab nationalities working here and everywhere, so why can't Jordanian contractors be given a similar opportunity? I'm sure they are highly qualified," he maintained.

At present, Mid Contracting Co. is cooperating with foreign investors to execute a number of projects in the Kingdom. But it now plans to spread its activities overseas, for example in Lebanon, Yemen among others.

The company has already opened a branch in the Palestinian territories, seeing that it could be a good market for its services and projects. However, Majali said that this branch has been inactive for some time because of the Israeli policy that blocks the way in front of any cooperation between Jordan and the Palestine National Authority. ■

Business Chronicle

Foreign investments under debate

THE QUALIFYING Industrial Zone (QIZ) designated last November at Al Hassan industrial area in Irbid, was then described as a tool to attract foreign investments to the Kingdom. Though some industrialists and manufacturers were cautious to welcome the agreement which was concluded between Jordan and the US during the controversial MENA economic conference held in Doha, others pointed out that it is better to wait for sometime until concrete steps have materialized. The agreement allows free access of Jordanian products to the American markets, exempted from customs. However, this was on the condition that this exemption applies to products manufactured in the Irbid industrial area.

At that time, this condition raised questions, leaving the door open for many expectations. Giving Irbid such a privilege, as some critics pointed out, must have been concluded to serve a certain objective. Some Jordanian investors described the agreement as a "bad deal" although it could be seen as a promising step to enhance foreign investments.

Now that few months have passed since the announcement of a Qualifying Industrial Zone, some Jordanian investors in Al Hassan industrial area are starting to complain. They say that the American facilities were given to Jordanian products upon a condition that there should be an Israeli partner who runs the plant or any industrial project jointly with a Jordanian counterpart.

This is in addition to another clause allowing free access of industrial inputs from Israel to the QIZ.

Local industrialists have been struggling for a long time to get industrial inputs exempted from taxes. Of course, this adds to additional expenses that local producers have to bear because of the latest hikes in the prices of water and electricity in the Kingdom.

Moreover, some local factories in the area have recorded relative losses resulting from problems related to severe competition from foreign products and their inability to cope with standards of high quality products.

Above all, there is a major problem that faces local products even if they abide to high quality specifications and requirements, which is finding new markets overseas, especially after losing some Gulf markets. Jordan today depends completely on the Iraqi market. Iraq has always been Jordan's strategic trade partner where its products find free access. Jordanian investors attribute the slow movement of foreign investments into Jordan to government red-tape which scares ambitious foreign investor away. Regardless of the difference between the size of the Egyptian and the Jordanian markets, some investors say that we should take the Egyptian experiment and its flexible legislations to attract more foreign investments as a good model for Jordanian investors.

They call on the government to enact modern laws to improve the investment climate in Jordan. However, no one can deny that Jordan has been successful in encouraging foreign investment after introducing the new Investment Promotion Law, which led to a remarkable rise in certain economic sectors, like tourism, in the Kingdom.

Last year, the size of foreign investments hit JD 124 million, about 35 percent of the overall investments totaling JD 380 million. In the case of the QIZ in Irbid, it is worth mentioning that there are three forms of investments in the area. Some are purely Jordanian investments operating with Jordanian capital, others are joint Jordanian-Arab ventures while the third are joint Jordanian-foreign enterprises. The latter is the core of dispute here, for it could be seen a way to help Israeli producers penetrate our market and threaten the domestic output.

Also, some observers voice tough criticism to such projects, functioning sometimes under the cover of a multinational partner or name, to abuse Jordanian man power. Many Jordanian laborers are being exploited by those factories, while getting very low wages if compared with an Israeli workers. ■

'Dialogue for the future'

An effort to overcome world's information gaps

MANAMA (Star)—In search for a "Dialogue for the Future," 300 policy-makers and media personalities from all over the world met in Bahrain in an effort to bridge the information gap between the East and the West, at the Euro-Arab Information and Media Conference.

The conference was held under the patronage of the Bahraini Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa Bin Sulman Al Khalifa, from the 23rd to the 25th of February. It was organized by the Paris-based Euro-Arab Centre for Studies, in co-operation with the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies based in London, and Bahrain Radio and Television Corp.

The conference presented a number of important topics of which the debates focused on raising recommendations to reach an agreement on a draft for a strategic joint Euro-Arab media treaty.

In a statement by the Chairman of the Euro-Arab Centre for studies Dr. Saleh Tayyar, he said that this treaty will help bridge the gap between the Arab and European media and will eliminate many of the misconceptions currently being spread by unreliable media services. He said that such a strategy will help project joint Euro-Arab rights and promote

understanding and mutual rights.

The various sessions of the conference tackled a number of issues which covered information and the revolution of communication at the edge of the 21st century, Euro-Arab Media in the face of global challenges; Euro-Arab investment development opportunities; Media and the demands of liberty and its limits and co-operation within the framework of information and the common Arab future.

Speakers at the conference include the Egyptian Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Moustaf Shehab; a representative of Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations; the Vice Director of the Middle East Division at the European Commission Rodney Standerling; the Secretary General of the Arab League Dr. Esmat Abdul Meguid; the UAE Information Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan; the Counselor to the Egyptian President for Political Affairs Osama Albaz; the former Tunisian information Minister Mustafa Al Massoudi; the correspondent of the Daily Telegraph and Middle East Editor-in-Charge of the Independent John Bullock; the General Secretary's Assistant to the Centrist Group

next to the Senate Francis Thual; John Cookson, Senior Reporter of Sky TV London and Bahraini Intellectual and the Crown Prince's Advisor Mr. Mohammed Jaber Al Ansari. ■

New Insurance draft law

THE INSURANCE Comptroller at the Ministry of Industry and Trade had finalized the new insurance draft law for 1998.

A committee has been formed in accordance with the draft law in order to organize the insurance sector in the Kingdom including life insurance, savings, fire and car accidents, transport, and others. The committee is authorized to ban or limit investments of insurance companies in all fields.

Also the draft law outlines the limits of financial solvency required by insurance companies to maintain their operations. ■

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Jordanians and all the usual suspects on the Internet

By Haitham Ibrahim and Khaldoon Tabaza

JORDANIANS ARE no strangers to the tension pervading the Middle East. But with the advent of new media technology in the 1990s, such as satellite dishes and now the Internet, Jordanians' sense of the world is no longer filtered through government-owned and controlled media.

This was evident during the recent impasse between the United Nations and Iraq. Many a press columnist and lay person alike felt free to express scorn for the US's continued support of sanctions imposed against the Iraqi people—a position viewed in Jordan as highly ironic since the US had helped Iraq build its arsenal to stave off the Iranian threat to the region's oil supplies during the Iraq-Iran war.

While the new media is enabling Jordanians to make their own judgments about the world and themselves, it is also giving new life to a variety of conspiracy theories. And, because Jordanians are seeing things on their TV screens that they view as propaganda driven by powers with a vested interest in the region, they are even more inclined to believe those theories.

Exacerbating and entrenching Jordanians' belief in conspiracies against them as well as Arabs in general is the ill-founded stereotypes perpetuated by the entertainment industry in Hollywood and broadcast worldwide. For instance, Disney's latest hit film *G.I. Jane* features Demi Moore gratuitously killing Arabs. In the eyes of many people in the region, the film is an attempt at disparaging and defaming Arabs as desert villains unworthy of life.

The question remains as to why such stereotypes and onslaughts are launched. One venue replete with answers is the Internet, which has a wide following in Jordan with well over 10,000 subscribers.

One posting to Arabia.OnLine (<http://arabia.com>), the Arab world's largest Internet media network, cites the place many Arabs believe is the



origin of—and prime actor in—many conspiracies: Israel. "When a few Jews died in a bomb attack in Israel, the US was quick to call for an international conference in Sharm al Sheikh to condemn the attack," the posting reads. "But when 600,000 Iraqi children die because of the American sanctions and blockade of Iraq, the US and the West don't give a damn."

The above sentiment resonates around the Internet on even moderate Arab-related sites, such as the Committee on the Middle East (<http://www.middleeast.org>). The committee declares that "US policies in the Middle East have for too long been determined by the power and money of special interest groups as well as by narrow nationalist economic exploitation."

The committee's statement reflects a prevalent mood of distrust between Arabs and Israelis, and for good reason. Continued Israeli annexation of land and building of settlements corroborates Arab beliefs that Israelis harbor ill intentions and cannot be trusted, while several suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv reaffirmed the Israeli belief that Arabs do not want peace.

This inextricable tangle of suspicion and mistrust mutually reinforces the belief that both sides are conspiring against each other.

The Internet carries these sentiments and suspicions further, sometimes on more sophisticated and disguised levels. For

example, the Virtual Jerusalem Web site (<http://www.virtual.co.il>) proclaims Jerusalem Israeli even when final status talks have not been concluded with the Palestinians. On the other hand, the Palestinian National Authority homepage proclaims Jerusalem as "our capital" and argues that much Western history is a conspiracy aimed at legitimizing Israel's claim to the Holy City.

In another example, the Israeli Prime Minister's office (www.pmo.gov.il) explains belligerent Israeli policies and peace

stalling measures as a function of "incitement by the Palestinian Authority." And this is not an offbeat site tucked into an unknown corner of cyberspace; this comes from the highest official sources in Israel.

Politics does not delimit the bounds of conspiracy tales. Britain's Princess Diana and her Egyptian boyfriend's

untimely and horrific death in a Paris tunnel sent people in the Middle East into a frenzy of accusations against intelligence agents and the British monarchy. They reasoned that Dodi Al-Fayed's relationship with Diana was too close for comfort as far as England's allegedly xenophobic royal family was concerned.

Once again, Western media sources seemed to delight in pouring fuel on the conspiracy flames. In an article by Ted Cohen in *Time* magazine (Sept. 8), Dodi is pictured as an "unreconstructed playboy," his taste in books seems to run mainly to a little black one that once contained names such as Brooke Shields and Tawny Kitaen.

Cohen further quotes a London Daily Mail correspondent as having warned the princess that by marrying into the clan of Al Fayed she would be "trading in one prison, the life-style of the royal family, for something worse, an Arab one." Cohen never qualifies how the latter is worse. It is a fact unto itself that Arabs are worse—no explanation is necessary.

Unraveling the tangles of individual conspiracy theories is like stepping into a minefield—you don't know if you are on the right track until it goes off. However, there are some general truths about the nature of the minefield. One of them is that conspiracy theories are frequently woven by the powers that be to justify policy and to pave the way towards manipulating and capturing public opinion.

This is as true for the West as it is for the Middle East, and for the same reason: it works. For the party that feels dispossessed, conspiracy theories are the underdog's psychological trapeze that allows them to escape the real reason things are not happening the way they should.

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Chomsky on Washington's Iraq policy

THE FOLLOWING interview took place last week with Professor Noam Chomsky:

The US says it wants to intervene in Iraq to impose respect of UN resolutions. Is this the real reason?

To evaluate the proposal, we can ask how the US itself respects UN resolutions. There are simple ways to check. For the past 30 years, the US is far in the lead in vetoing Security Council Resolutions (Britain second, France a distant third). In the General Assembly, the US regularly votes against resolutions in virtual isolation—hence in effect vetoing them—on a wide range of issues. The pattern extends to the World Court, international conventions on human rights, and much else.

Furthermore, the US freely disregards violation of UN resolutions that it has formally endorsed, and often contributes materially to such violation. The case of Israel is notorious (for example, the 1978 Security Council resolution calling on Israel to withdraw immediately from Lebanon). To select another example that is quite relevant here, in December 1975 the Security Council unanimously ordered Indonesia to withdraw its invading forces from East Timor "without delay" and called upon "all States to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor as well as the inalienable right of its people to self-determination."

The US responded by (secretly) increasing its shipments of arms to the aggressors, accelerating the arms flow once again as the attack reached near-genocidal levels in 1978.

In his memoirs, US ambassador to the UN Daniel Patrick Moynihan takes pride in his success in rendering the UN "utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook," following the instructions of the State Department, which "wished things to turn out as they did and worked to bring this about." The US also cheerfully accepts the robbery of East Timor's oil (with participation of US-based companies), in violation of any reasonable interpretation of international agreements. The analogy to Iraq/Kuwait is close,

though there are differences: to mention only the most obvious, US-tucked atrocities in East Timor were vastly beyond anything attributed to Saddam Hussein in Kuwait. It is easy to extend the record.

Like other great powers, the US is committed to the rule of force, not law, in international affairs. UN Resolutions, World Court Judgments, International Conventions, etc., are acceptable if they accord with policy; otherwise they are mere words.

Which difference do you see between this intervention and Operation "Desert Storm" with the Bush administration?

There are many differences. "Desert Storm" was allegedly intended to drive Iraq from Kuwait; today the alleged goal is to compel Iraq to permit UN inspection of Saddam's weapons programs. In both cases, a closer look reveals a more complex story. After Iraq invaded Kuwait, the US feared that in "the next few days Iraq will withdraw" leaving in place a puppet government and "every-one in the Arab world will be happy" (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell). The concern, in brief, was that Iraq would act much as the US had done a few months earlier when it invaded Panama (vetoing two Security Council resolutions condemning its actions).

What followed also does not quite conform to standard versions. Today, it is widely expected that a military strike will leave Iraq's murderous tyrant in power, continuing to pursue his weapons programs, while undermining such international inspection as exists. It may also be recalled that Saddam's worst crimes were committed when he was a favored US ally and trading partner, and that immediately after he was driven from Kuwait, the US watched quietly while he turned to the slaughter of rebellious Iraqis, even refusing to allow them access to captured Iraqi arms. Nonetheless, the differences between 1990 and today are substantial.

Do you see in Iraq an alternative to Saddam Hussein?

The rebelling forces in March 1991 were an alternative, but the US preferred Saddam. There was an Iraqi democratic opposition in exile. Washington refused to have anything to do with them before, during, or after the Gulf War, and they were virtually excluded from the US media, apart from marginal dissident journals.

"Political meetings with them would not be appropriate for our policy at this time," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher stated on March 14, 1991, while Saddam was decimating the opposition under the eyes of Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf. They still exist. How realistic their programs are, I cannot judge, and I do not think we can know as long as the US remains committed—as apparently it still is—to the Bush administration policy that preferred "an iron-fisted Iraqi junta," without Saddam Hussein if possible, a return to the days when Saddam's "iron fist" held Iraq together, much to the satisfaction of the American allies Turkey and Saudi Arabia, not to speak of Washington (NY Times chief diplomatic correspondent Thomas Friedman, July 1991).

Why did embargo not work against Saddam's regime?

The effects of the sanctions come as no surprise. They have strengthened Saddam's position and undermined potential resistance to him among people struggling to survive. New bombing is likely to have a similar effect.

This time, do you believe it will be again "Exxon's war"? I do not think it was "Exxon's war" in 1991, or today, at least in a narrow sense. It is quite true that since World War II, the US has been firmly committed to maintaining control over Middle East oil, which the State Department described as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history." But there is no persuasive evidence that in 1990-91, the US was concerned about an Iraqi threat to this control. There is, however, good reason to believe that Washington saw the Iraqi inva-



sion as an opportunity to extend its control—to demonstrate that "what we say goes," as George Bush announced triumphantly while the missiles and bombs were falling.

In fact, the US used the opportunity to institute at once the rejectionist version of the Israel-Arab "peace process" that it had maintained in virtual international isolation for 25 years, but was now able to implement. Previously, the US had been compelled to veto Security Council resolutions calling for a diplomatic settlement, to vote regularly against similar General Assembly resolutions, (the last in December 1990, passed 144-2, the US and Israel opposed), and to undermine other diplomatic initiatives from Europe, the Arab world, and others.

But after the Gulf War, the US was finally able to proceed, unopposed. The background issue remains control of the world's major energy reserves, but apart from that, the specific problems of US energy corporations have not directly motivated the policies we are discussing.

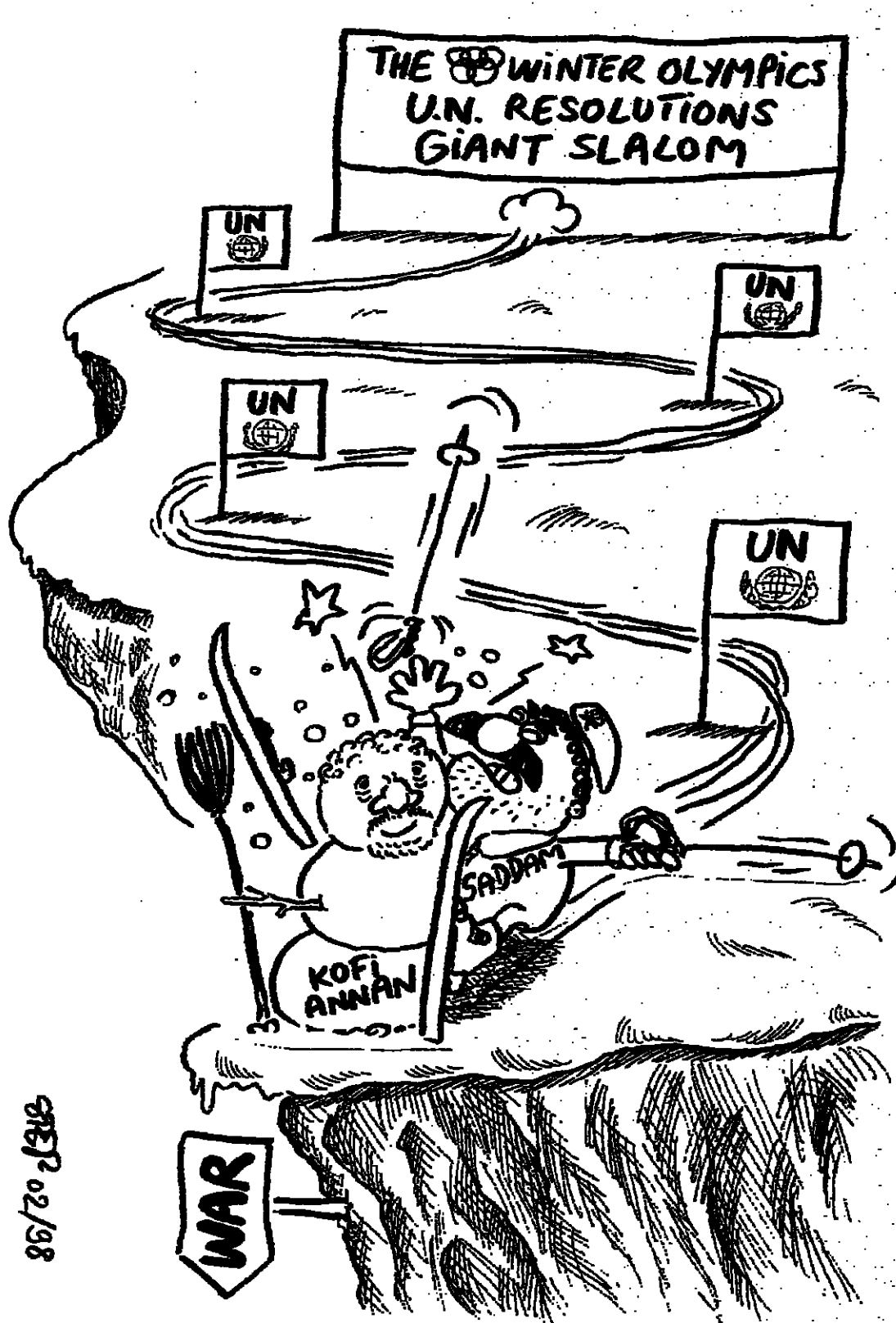
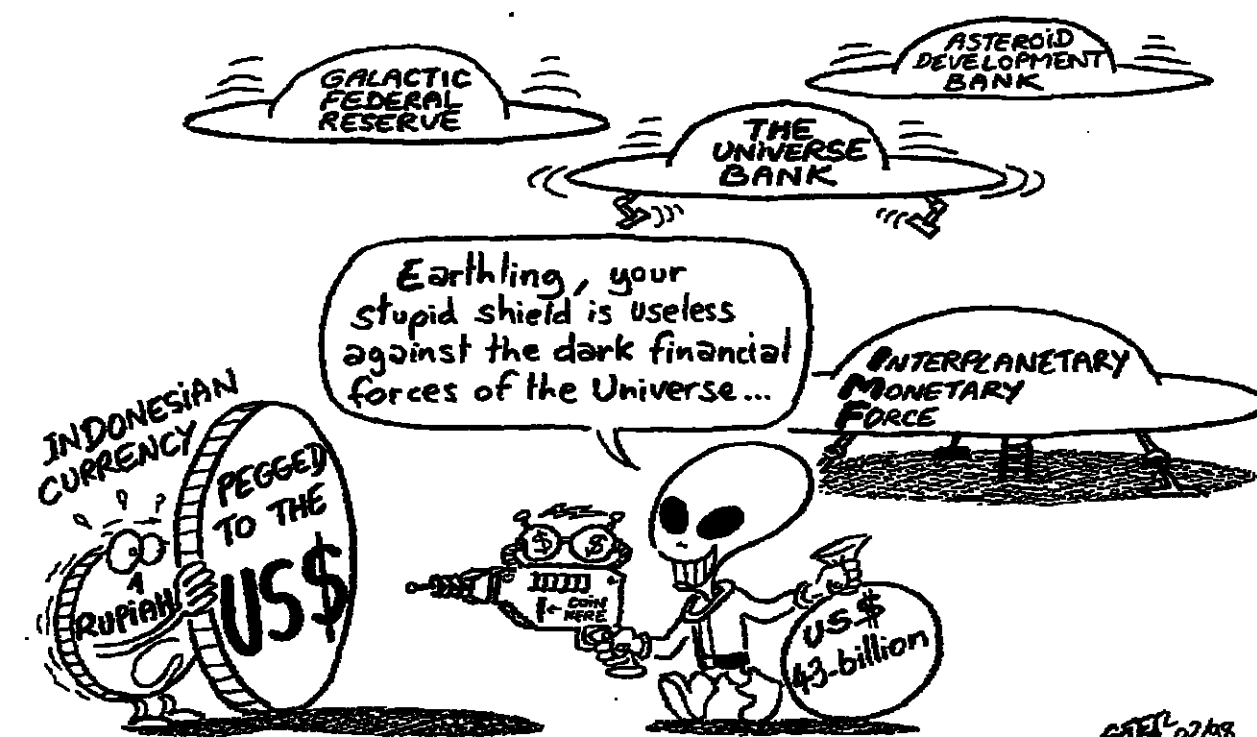
This time, is it possible to link Gaza and the West Bank with respect of UN resolutions?

Highly unlikely, as things now stand. The US government could always have linked the issues, but has preferred not to. Its goal for the Israeli-occupied territories is the Bantustan-style settlement that is now being imposed (Israel's two political groupings are not very different in this regard). US attitudes towards UN resolutions on these issues can readily be determined by reviewing the record of US vetoes, isolated negative votes, and disregard of continuing violations.

MER

World events according to Peray

Stephane Peray is an editorial cartoonist living in Bangkok. He contributed these cartoons to The Star



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Fashion

Swimsuit issues, cheesecake culture?

By Robin Givhan

THE SPORTS Illustrated swimsuit issue occupies a curious place in popular American culture. It is not about fashion. Nor is it about sports. But to say it is solely a volume of cheesecake portraiture wouldn't quite be accurate either. Although it would be close.

It is mainstream, middle-brow and middle American. In its pages are photos depicting the currently agreed-upon cultural definition of female beauty. There have been subtle changes in the swimsuit issue, now in its 35th year. The looks of the models are slightly more varied. The styles of swimwear are more creative. There are men in this issue.

Whether any of this will be noticed amid the shots of cleavage, derrieres and inner thighs depends on a reader's observational skills. Who will notice a model's contemplative expression when she's bent over to give her breasts maximum exposure? According to the magazine, 55 million adults will read this year's edition of the swimsuit issue. Of that, 19 million will be women. Readership of the regular weekly edition is 24 million adults, 5 million of whom are women.

To generate interest in the magazine, the company keeps the identity of the cover girl a tightly wrapped secret until just before the magazine arrives on newsstands. This year it's Heidi Klum, a virtual unknown. It should be pointed out that the look of the cover girl is not one of the subtle changes the magazine has boasted about. Klum is the Elle Macpherson-Christie Brinkley gene pool, blond, leggy and curvy. She is undeniably a beauty.

Traditionally, landing this



high-profile spot means a host of personal appearances. It does not, however, mean that the model will soon be smiling from the cover of *Vogue* or vamping it up in a Versace advertising campaign. That is high fashion.

Sports Illustrated is cheesecake—beautifully photographed in far-flung locations. What Sports Illustrated offers is name recognition outside of the fashion industry. Models pictured in the swimsuit edition are individually identified.

That is rarely the case in a fashion magazine. Their value goes up in terms of advertising products," says swimsuit edition editor Elaine Farley. Who gets the cover is based, Farley says, on who

takes the best photograph, the one that is "sexy, fresh, modern and fun." Cleavage also helps. Who gets into the magazine, however, is based on who looks good in a bikini regardless of breast size. "We want all shapes and sizes... within a certain parameter. This magazine clearly is filled with women with great bodies," Farley says. The question is: What defines great?

Here is where a few changes have taken place. A great body still is not defined as a size 14. But, Farley has, with the inclusion of Siberian model Irina Pantaeva, broadened the definition—slightly. "She's slim, petite on top... She's not as curvy," she says. "But she has legs that go almost up to her neck." Farley, who spent four years at Glamour magazine covering the designer sportswear and swimwear markets, has been at SI for two years. She has tried to make the swimsuit issue more reflective of fashion trends. And so, included in the mix of traditional swimwear labels are ensembles from Gaultier, Gucci and Chanel, sometimes shot without a drop of water in sight.

The magazine is taking a marketing lesson from the Oscars and positioning itself as the swimwear media event where a designer's bikinis and maillots must be seen. Yet even with the addition of some high-priced bikinis and a few models with more boyish figures, the SI swimsuit issue still is about pretty women wearing next to nothing. The featured men, it should be noted, are baring only a modest amount of skin. Debate the political ramifications of that if you will.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Dances in a carriage with Zambian smugglers



By Christina Lamb

WHEN WE decided to go by train from Mpika, in northern Zambia, to Dar es Salaam, I did not expect my dancing prowess to be on trial.

But I should have realised it would be no ordinary journey when I called Tazara reservations and a giggling voice answered, "Here is Beauty."

When I explained I was calling from Portugal, Beauty was very excited. "Por-too-gell," she said in wonder, "what time is it?" When we established it was the same as in Zambia, Beauty was astonished. Someone called Precious came on the line, equally excited, then the telephone went dead.

After several conversations, which never got near reserving a compartment, I gave up and decided to try my luck on arrival. The Tazara train goes from Zambia to Tanzania twice a week and, according to my guide book, is one of Africa's most reliable.

The line was built by the Chinese and the company's motto is "On Time All The Time". So the Friday morning that I arrived with my boyfriend at Mpika station a concrete monstrosity in the African bush to buy our tickets and catch the afternoon train, we were confident of soon departing.

Forty hours later, we were still waiting. Now 40 hours is a long time, even for those used to the vagaries of England's Connex South Central. It is a very long time in Mpika, where the concrete road from the station peters out after 50 metres into red clay dotted with shacks. Few tourists stop and we were soon the object of fascination.

People popped up from nowhere to tell us about Chinese railway workers breeding dogs to eat for dinner. The one-eyed stationmaster confided his dream of becoming a marketing executive. A group of evangelists with black briefcases tried to convert us, and a man asked Paulo how many cows he had paid for me.

We hung out in Kalolo's bakery, the only cafe, where we introduced the custom of halving scones and spreading them with butter, and bought the only painting off Kalolo's wall. News spread and we were besieged by people trying to sell us land, baskets and brown pebbles. By the time the train came, at 4am on the second day, we had many new friends.

We were, however, seriously short of sleep and dreaming of our first-class sleeper compartment, which we hoped we would have to ourselves. So when I slid open the door and nine smiling Zambians stared out, my heart sank.

"Come in!" they called, apparently well into their second case of Mosi beer. Sharing a compartment for four with nine other people who are drunk and want to party when you want to sleep, is not conducive to international relations. Grumpily clearing people off our bunks, we covered ourselves in Tazara blankets and tried to sleep.

At 6am the radio came on, blasting out music. One of our new bedfellows opened the blinds and announced it was time for breakfast. Barely conscious, we stumbled along the corridor to the dining car for rubbery omelettes, cold toast and grey tea.

Everyone else seemed to be in their best clothes: men in shiny shoes, spotted bow ties and colourful shirts, women with complicated head-dresses, putting us, the only white passengers, to shame in our dusty jeans and T-shirts.

Back in the compartment, our fellow passengers introduced themselves and apologised for the previous night. I apologised for my bad mood. They handed us beers and we were all friends. They were travelling to Dar es Salaam to buy car parts. In Zambia, they cost five times more because of high import tariffs.

"What about customs?" I asked Chola John, the leader of the group. "We have an arrangement with the customs officer," he smiled. The day got hotter and the music louder. More beers were drunk. We stopped at villages of beehive huts and acacia trees.

Suddenly Chola John's wife Joan, slid her ample frame off the seat. "Time to dance," she shouted. "Yes, yes, yes!" yelled Chama, a big-bottomed schoolteacher. Soon everyone but us was dancing. "Cristineee, you will show us how people dance in London," commanded Moses.

Never the most elegant of people on the dance-floor, I shuffled my feet. My audience was not impressed. "Cristineee, we will teach you to dance like an African mama." Soon the whole train had heard about the white woman trying to dance the African way. People came and offered advice, but it was no good: my hips just would not sway with that graceful fluidity.

Paulo, who is dusky and Portuguese, kept getting mistaken for the Zambian Minister of Agriculture, and was thus excused from dancing. We were both relieved when lunch was announced. In the dining car, everyone we met told us they were off to buy spare car parts.

Having made up its mind to be late, the train fell further behind schedule. By the second day the water ran out, so we were not only drinking Mosi, but brushing our teeth in it. The stream of visitors to our compartment continued.

On the third and last day, as the train crossed into Tanzania, and the beer switched from Mosi to Safari, we hogged the window seats pointing at the Masai with their cattle and hoping to see wild animals.

"How is the bush in Portugal?" asked Chola John. "Do you have giraffes?" Before we could answer, the radio, which had been mercifully silent, started blaring again. "Time for dancing," shouted Moses.

Financial Times Syndication

British rock band Radiohead to skip Grammy awards

By Robert Hilburn

LONDON—So does Thom Yorke of Radiohead have his Grammy acceptance speech already written?

"Oh, yeah," Yorke says, smiling mischievously. "I'd like to thank..." His voice trails off, but the smile remains.

Well no, Yorke admits, the British rock band won't be in New York on Wednesday for the Grammy Awards, even though its "OK Computer" is nominated for album of the year.

He appreciates the nomination (and a second for best alternative music recording), but he doesn't feel the group would fit in amid all the "luxes and self-congratulation" of the evening, and they don't want to end up making some ill-timed remarks to a Eddie Vedder, who ended up dismissing the Grammys when the band accepted an award in the 1996 telecast.

For fans of the fiercely uncompromising, relatively low-profile band, the surprise isn't that the group will skip the ceremonies, but that Yorke actually can smile.

Partially because of Radiohead's first U.S. hit, a shattering 1993 dose of self-loathing titled "Creep," Yorke has a reputation, in his own words, of being a "miserable bastard."

On stage, the 29-year-old sings mostly about psychological struggles with such primal urgency that he all but defies you to take your eyes off him. The raw intensity reminds you in the often overly theatrical world of pop-rock that there's nothing more riveting than simply unbridled passion.

This passion, also reflected in the rest of the quintet, has placed Radiohead as a prominent member of a new generation of rewording British bands—also including Oasis, the Verve and Pulp—that have rekindled an interest in British rock in America.

Those four bands alone sold more than \$250 million worth of albums around the world in 1997, and they dominated year-end critics' polls on both sides of the Atlantic. In a rare show of agreement, both Rolling Stone and Spin named Radiohead the best group of the year. Rolling Stone also declared the Verve's "Bitter

Sweet Symphony" the single of the year.

One major reason for the British upsurge is Radiohead, a band that surrounds Yorke's frequently brooding or questioning lyrics with timeless and sophisticated musical textures that recall the artful ambition and range of Pink Floyd or the late-period Beatles.

In fact, industry insiders hold Radiohead in such respect that many believe the group has a chance of reaching the critical and commercial plateau of a U2 or R.E.M.

"I get a little nervous about things like awards and sales," Yorke says during the interview. "Part of me wonders if all that makes it harder for you to focus on what you should be doing as artists."

The turnaround was the breakthrough of Oasis in 1994. Here was a band that wrote captivating songs that radio couldn't ignore and a band that had the career ambition to work hard, both in England and in the United States.

"Oasis opened the door to the English record-buying public again," Boyd said. "It was amazing. I remember going down to a pub in the financial district one night and there were guys in suits singing (Oasis') 'Wonderwall,' and then I'd go to someone's house and there was kids singing the same song."

"People rediscovered music here through Oasis and then they started asking what else could they listen to... and the trail led to the Verve and Radiohead and the other bands. They forced radio to open up the programming... to play more quality music."

The irony about Radiohead's place in the current hierarchy of outstanding British bands is that the quintet was one of the groups that many U.S. critics would have pointed to five years ago as an example of why British rock was then trailing U.S. rock.

"Creep," the 1993 single, was an undeniably catchy radio tune, but it seemed calculated. Unlike the ragged alienation of Nirvana or Soundgarden, "Creep" expressed inner doubts with a slickness that suggested some studio pros trying to capitalize on the youthful anger that was fueling the record business at the time.



Yorke felt the backlash and, to a degree, even understood it. He never meant "Creep," which appeared on Radiohead's 1992 debut album, "Pablo Honey," to be a signature tune for the band. In fact, he wrote it, in part, as a joke.

"I was drunk and feeling sorry for myself," he says of the night he wrote the hit. "It was meant to be an exaggeration, a bit of melodrama, even kind of humorous."

Rather than sing it in that spirit in the studio, however, Yorke somehow identified with the feelings of insecurity in the song, and he sang it straight. The problem was that young rock fans identified with it and expected Yorke to deliver it on stage with the same, soul-baring force night after night.

Eventually, Yorke channeled some of the confusion of the time into the songs for the follow-up album, "The Bends." In "My Iron Lung," he even described the band as feeling trapped by its image and tour demands the same way someone might feel restricted to a hospital respirator.

"The Bends" was a knockout of an album that combined all sorts of exquisite musical textures with songs of genuine feeling about longing and need. And it slowly began to eat away at the early skepticism.

One thing the album and subsequent shows demonstrated was that Radiohead was far more than a one-man show. The rest of the group—guitarists Jonny Greenwood and Ed O'Brien, bassist Colin Greenwood and drummer Phil Selway—brought an intelligence and style to the music

that separated the band from most of its contemporaries.

"OK Computer," the group's third album, hit the rock world with a bang last year, selling 31 million copies worldwide and earning the Grammy nominations. In England, it turned Yorke into a bona fide star.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

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Tuesday, 3 March 1998 JD 12

Allepo Singer Adib Dayikh
and French Qanoun Player Julien Jaleddin Weiss

Wednesday, 4 March 1998 JD 15

The Promising Jordanian Singer Qamar Badwan and
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Featuring popular songs by Farid Attarash, Mohammad Abdul Wahab, Umm Kulthum, Asmahan and others.

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Marcel Khalife and Charbel Rouhana

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by invitation

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ROYAL JORDANIAN
موسيقى



● Mrs Lena Hjelm Waalen, Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs and her delegation visited the Radisson SAS Hotel Amman. Mr Christian Garmann, General Manager of the hotel was presented with compliments by Mrs Hjelm Waalen on the newly renovated guest rooms and suites as well as the excellent services extended to the delegation. Upon departure, Mrs Hjelm Waalen signed the hotel's Golden Book.



Salah Al Mur

An exquisite expression of Sudanese art

By Anca de Maio
Special to The Star

Displaying for the first time in Jordan, Salah Al Mur has brought to Amman 40 of his most recent paintings and offered local viewers a convincing sample of exquisite Sudanese art. Nourishing on the cultural variety of an Arab African country with Muslim, Christian and animist traditions, Al Mur's artwork reveals the personal mythology of an abstract-minded artist to whom decoration is as important as figuration.

Against a rhythmic background of typically Sudanese motifs, Al Mur's pictures hang on the walls of Baladna Gallery, one by one, the stunning mysteries of a harmoniously colored world inhabited by immaterial human figures and by magical plants growing in the humps of a camel, in the belly of a crocodile or in the dome of an upside down mosque. Fantastic animals like bird-headed monkeys or dogs, fox-headed crocodiles and pyramid-backed camels as well as trivial fish, as it were, dwell in this one-dimensional universe too.

Deprived of such spatial notions as up and down, fore and back, Al Mur's personal mythology is built on the key term of absolute "coexistence". The organic is part of the inorganic just as the figures are part of the background. The material world prolongs into the spiritual one, nobody knowing where one stops and where the other

starts. "Death makes part of our life on earth", said the artist in front of a picture showing a horizontal human body lying down at the feet of two vertical ones. With Al Mur the crescent moon, the sun and the stars can shine side by side, since day and night, life and death overlap.

"In my early work, the backgrounds of my paintings were flat and less colorful", Al Mur recalled. "Now, the background is as rich in decorations and significance as my abstract figures," he said. Nothing can be removed from the composition without ruining the balance of the whole. Each ornamental detail or tiny spot of color has its very precise place in the picture. "When I start to paint, I know exactly what the painting is to look like", he explained. "I can see it very clearly in my mind, and it is just a matter of time to get it down on paper: sometimes one night, sometimes one month."

Speaking about his work habits, Al Mur works emphasized on his working only at night. Alone in his study, he starts with drawing some outlines in black ink, over which he will put several layers of colors until the painting is ready. "I do from four to sometimes eleven layers of acrylic color," he stressed. "I let each of them dry before I add another one," he continued. He pointed out that he always left blank spots on the paper.

"Either I color them in green, red, yellow and even black and use them as 'lamps', that is details lightening the colors and decorations around them, or I simply let them blank," he said.



Smaller or bigger patches of unpainted white paper are indispensable for all of his compositions.

Al Mur's mixing colors is primarily an academic matter. "There are certain rules that an artist follows in order to obtain harmony and contrasts," he admitted. Besides the recipes of a professionalist, there is also the spontaneous discovery of new combinations. "I love green in particular, but I use all colors from the browns of earth and sand to the blues of the Nile and of the sky, just like in the beautifully decorated traditional clothes of Sudanese women," he said.

The decorative motifs of Al Mur's paintings have the naive and innovating on old Sudanese mural and skin decoration techniques, the artist transforms skin relief patterns of Nubians (tribe in the southeast of Sudan), local clay ornaments and Islamic elements into a completely new fan of decorative designs. Geometric and "vegetal" forms are very frequent: curves and spirals, circles (suns), semi-circles and crescents (moons), triangles (butterfly wings) and diamonds, relief leaf veins and dots. "The heart and the fish shapes in particular are very dear to me," said the painter. "For me, the former recalls the embroidery my mum used to do when I was a child, and

the latter is a veneration sign for my grandparents' life as fishers on the banks of the Nile", he explained.

Born in 1966, Salah Al-Mur started to paint 15 years ago. He graduated in 1988 from the Graphic Design Dept. of the Fine and Applied Art College in Khartoum. He is very grateful to two of his professors who guided him in his approach to art: Hossain Jaman and Ahmed Al Mardi. Since 1984 he has been participating in many workshops and has been displaying in Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Syria, Egypt, the Emirates, Lebanon, Spain and Jordan.

Some of his paintings are on display in Spain, Britain, Canada, France, USA and Germany. At present he lives and works in a small village near Nairobi in Kenya. He also has a studio in his house in Khartoum, where his wife and three kids reside.

His next exhibition will take place in April in Kampala, Uganda, a place where he hopes art market be more encouraging than the one in Jordan today.

"Now that everybody fears a new war in the region, it is natural that people may think it is not the right moment for them to spend their money on paintings," he said with a shrug.

Unicorn Ensemble in Amman

By Christian Doumit
Special to The Star

If we are so ill prepared to grasp the music of the 18th and 19th century, what will we face when approaching more distant periods. Music of the centuries prior to the 18th called "old" or "pre-Bach" music, is still shrouded in mystery. It was not until the 19th century that this music was rediscovered, because in reality the music of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque had ceased to be a living art. Its tradition had vanished and all that was left were fragmented specimens. Our immediate musical heritage is that of 19th century romanticism which discovered old music because the antiquarian yearning was one of its basic traits. It is an ingrained fallacy that music was slow in coming of age and that it trailed the other arts by centuries. While the poetry, drama, paintings, and architecture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were giving a light of their own with Milton, Shakespeare, Giotto, and the great cathedrals, music historians and musicologists have only recently come to the rescue of that "old music" unearthing, deciphering, and explaining the music of the past centuries and presenting it to the public of today.

Michael Posch (recorder), Marco Ambrosini (keyed fiddle), Riccardo Dellino (Oud, fiddle, rihuela d'arco), and Wolfgang Reinthofer (percussion instrument) did just that when their Ensemble Unicorn gave a concert last Sunday at the Royal Cultural Center. This unusual musical event which was organized by the National Music Conservatory in co-operation with the Austrian Embassy, left the audience in a state of emotion that only great art can convey.

Music consisting of a balanced union of melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic components did not exist in the Middle Ages. Instead, there is a predominance of one or the other which leads an entirely independent life. It was only during the classical era several hundred years later that strict rules were applied as to form and musical construction. Even then we can observe the Italian preference for melody at the expense of harmony and counterpoint so predominant with German composers.

The first part of the concert was devoted to dance pieces dating from the 1400's in northern Italy, which at that time was part of Austria. The joyfulness of these dances—with their rhythmic patterns, improvisations, and natural freshness—alternate between forces and drolleries to what can be described as sub-time lyrics. After the intermission, the members of the Ensemble performed their own compositions in medieval style. The melodies were acquired from the travels to many countries. There were several oriental—like melodies from Moorish Spain (Alhambra and Cansone Mozarabical). The music of the Middle Ages gave the players considerable freedom. Many pieces were improvised and composed and singers had ample leeway in the choice and the technical handling of their instruments.

A unique Scandinavian touch

By Natasha Twal
Special to The Star

An Exhibition of Finnish Literature and Textiles is currently being held in Amman at the Royal Cultural Center. This exhibition is organized by the Literature Archives of The Finnish Literature Society in cooperation with the Finnish Institute in The Middle East (FIME), an organization consisting of scholars of various Finnish universities.

The main concept of this exhibition, which is under the patronage of HRH Princess Majda Raad and will end on 27 February, is to introduce Finnish literature to the Jordanian public by displaying two distinguished works of classical literature.

The first, The Kalevala—the central source of symbols in the Finnish culture—is a collection of poems transmitted orally of the Finnish-speaking population of Finnish Karelia, White Sea Karelia and Ingria. These poems were collected by Elias Lönnrot (1802-1884), the "second father" of the written Finnish language, on his 11 field trips between 1828 and 1844.

The second piece of literature is The Egyptian "Sinuhe, egyptalainen", an internationally successful novel, written by the Finnish novelist, short-story writer and poet, Mika Waltari in 1949. Without being an Egyptologist, and never having visited Egypt, Waltari was able to create a credible historical document with the help of his imagination and through the story of the idealistic doctor, Sinuhe, and his servant Kapthah. It deals with the subject of human destiny in a rough world full of material values, the preservation of a spark of humanity under domination and power when important values have collapsed.

The work is made timeless by its picaresque humor, a love story and the story of a man's development. It is a novel that continues to live its own life today, 50 years on, whatever the cul-

ture in which it is read. This novel was translated into 30 languages including Arabic "Sinuhi al misti" by Hamid al-Qasbi.

Besides presenting these fascinating works of literature, the exhibition also displays traditional Finnish tapestries "The Rytty". These Finnish tapestries, rich in tradition and in artistic quality, are representative of the achievements of Finnish hand-weaving culture, deriving from the traditions of this hunting, fishing and agricultural people. It is a form of textile art peculiar to Finland.

Both the Finnish word "rytily" and the Swedish "rytt" derive from the Scandinavian, which implies something rough and shaggy. The Finnish textile artist, Kristiina Ihmuotila, contributes to this exhibition by displaying her work, which consists of wall hangings "ryta-rugs" centering on movement as a theme. They are all unique art pieces, hand-woven at a loom. The material is wool, linen or flax and silk.

This exhibition, which was also held in Cairo, Syria and Jerusalem, will be a major step towards encouraging other Finnish activities in the Kingdom. One concrete example is the establishment of a branch of The Finnish Insti-



Kristiina Ihmuotila, textile artist

tute here in Amman, declared Mrs Tuulikki Haddadin, the representative of the Institute in Amman and Syria and an active member of the Finnish Delegation. Mrs. Haddadin has also added that this regional Institute will promote the cultural exchange between the two countries, by organizing seminars, lectures and other various activities.

Kalevala—A cultural heritage of Finland

By Kofi Attah
Special to The Star

As the years go by and the signs of decline begin to show, millions of people all over the world reach the nadir of glory and start to experience humiliations and limitations. In order to preserve their roots, cultural heritage and past glory, the Finnish created "the Kalevala". To share this unprecedented inspiration and modern means of preserving and promoting people's culture, The Finnish Institute in the Middle East is organizing an Exhibition of Finnish Literature and Textile, at the Royal Cultural Center under the patronage of HRH Princess Majda Raad.

The exhibition, which opened on 22 February, features literary works and objects of art including an Epic of Finland 1835-1995, the Human Voice by Mika Waltari, Kalevala ornaments and Finnish textile.

"The Kalevala is the central source of symbols in Finnish culture, a great epic for the whole of mankind and the part of the world's cultural heritage," says Rajja Majamaa, the organizer. Majamaa is the head of National Collections Services, Department of National Collections and Preservation, Helsinki University Library.

The Kalevala is a poetic work of high artistic quality, a symbol of Finnishness, a continual inspiration for works of art, literature, theatre, music and dance, architecture and designs. The Nordic exotic nature that characterizes the mental reality of the Kalevala veils the universal ancient Eurasian myths on which it is built.

Among the literary works on display at the Cultural Center is "The Human Voice" by Mika Waltari (1908-1979). He remains internationally the most successful, a classic of world literature. Waltari's works have been translated into 30 languages including Arabic. "A

Stranger Came to the Farm" (1952). Translated into Arabic "Al Zaman li hubh" by the Egyptian Muhammad Badre Al din Khalil, Hilmi Murad, Cairo, 1956.

He wrote more than 100 books. He was a novelist, crime-writer, short-story writer, poet, dramatist and script writer for more than 30 films. His only ambition was to write as well as he could, to express himself through all the problems of humanity, human corruption, goodness, everything in humankind without ever hating mankind, for man is man's only brother on earth. He stood for peace and a world of coexistence.

Also on display is the documented Kalevala jewelry. Gerund Paaser, the Finnish artist, drew the first Kalevala jewelry models chosen out of the collection of the National Museum. He also designed folkloric ornaments of his own. The documented ornaments on display are the works of various Finnish artists dated 1000 AD. Kalevala jewelry is

designed to conform with Finnish cultural heritage of Kalevala. The ornaments are decorated with motifs which are either historical or designed by artists of our time.

Kalevala jewelry brings history closer. Every moment has its own story to tell about the past times, people and culture. The jewelry presents bracelets, brooches, earrings, rings, necklaces, pendants and other products all made of gold, silver or bronze. The material in golden jewelry is either 14 carat gold (585/000) or 18 carat gold (750/000). All exhibits are for sale.

The few wall hangings are by the textile artist, Kristiina Ihmuotila. They describe the theme of movement. The shapes are softly moving like waves. They are all unique art-pieces, hand woven at a loom. The material is wool, linen or flax and silk. The structure is three-dimensional, consisting of tufts. The colors turn like in a painting, sliding from a darker color into a lighter one.

There are hundred of shades of color in one piece. The size of a piece is about 180 x 140 cm.

"My 'Rya-Rugs' describes abstract motifs, but performs phenomenon in nature," disclosed Kristiina Ihmuotila. A good example is "The stream", moving shapes of water, blue gold and purple. Yet another is "The August", Scandinavian light at night. Blue, white and gold, others are "Upwards" rising shapes of waves, "Blue Moment", lighter and darker shapes of blue and gray and "After the Rain", streaming water.

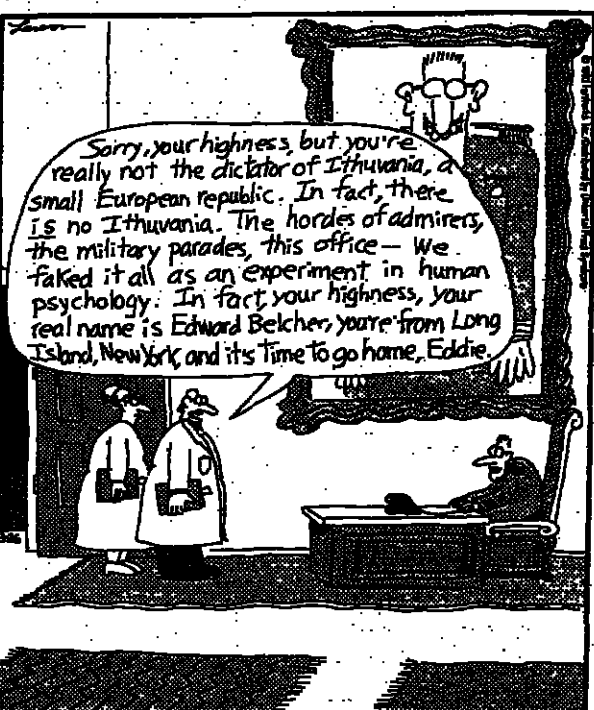
The most inspiring and nostalgic of the exhibits is the photograph by Marja Venkale tracing the prosperous Viking age (about AD 800-1050). An extraordinary photo with a blue-white sky background, and in the middle are four little Viking shields, the symbol of a past and a glorious moment, which the Finnish are fighting to preserve.

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



A Louvre guard is suddenly unsettled by the arrival of Linda Blair.



SLAPSTIX

Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead!

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مكتبة الملك فيصل

The Star's GUIDE

Programs on JTV from 1 - 7 March

ENGLISH PROGRAMS

SATURDAY
 4:00—Holy Koran
 4:10—The Hammerman
 4:30—French Program
 5:00—Canon The Adventurer
 6:00—Square One
 6:30—Neighbours
 7:00—News in French
 7:15—Discovering Magazine
 7:30—News Headlines
 7:35—You Bet Your Life
 8:00—Cinema, Cinema
 8:30—Prison
 9:10—Time Trax
 10:00—News At Ten
 10:30—Feature Film
 12:00—The Respected Family

SUNDAY
 4:00—Holy Koran
 4:10—Cartoon
 4:30—Kanan the Adventurer
 5:00—Don't Dream
 6:00—Skipper
 7:00—News in French
 7:15—A Tour in France
 7:30—News Headlines
 7:35—American Funniest
 8:00—Killing for Living
 8:30—People and Places in Africa
 9:10—Renegade
 10:00—News At Ten
 10:30—North And South
 11:10—The Upper Hand

MONDAY
 4:00—Holy Koran
 4:10—Cartoon
 4:30—Kanan the Adventurer
 5:00—Tallasa
 6:00—Riding High
 6:30—Neighbours
 7:00—News in French
 7:15—French Programs
 7:30—News Headlines
 7:35—Hope And Gloria
 8:00—Perspective
 8:30—American Chart Show



Baywatch Nights, Monday at 11:10 pm
 9:10—The Burned Bridge
 10:00—News At Ten
 10:30—Law & Order
 11:10—Baywatch Nights

TUESDAY
 4:00—Holy Koran
 4:10—CRO
 4:30—Kanan the Adventurer
 6:00—Small Talk
 6:30—Border Town
 7:00—News in French
 7:15—French Programs
 7:30—News Headlines
 7:35—A Whole New Ball game

WEDNESDAY
 4:00—Holy Koran
 4:10—Mr Bogus
 4:30—French Programs
 6:00—The Finder
 6:30—Neighbours
 7:00—News in French
 7:15—French Programs
 7:30—News Headlines
 7:35—Campus Cops

THURSDAY
 2:00—Holy Koran
 2:10—The Dinky Di's
 2:30—The Prince And The Pauper
 2:45—Energy Express
 2:55—Animal Show
 3:00—French Programs
 5:00—NBA
 6:00—Acapulco Bay
 7:00—News in French
 7:15—French Programs
 7:30—News Headlines
 7:35—Big Brother Jake
 8:00—Trivial Pursuit
 8:00—Great Romance
 8:30—Lois & Clark
 8:30—Dr. Quinn The Medicine Woman
 9:10—The Oprah Winfrey Show
 10:00—News At Ten
 10:30—Feature Film

FRIDAY
 2:00—Holy Koran
 2:10—Teddy Ruxpin
 2:30—French Programs
 5:00—Lucky Luke
 5:30—Blue Water Dreaming
 6:00—Tarzan
 7:00—News in French
 7:15—French Program
 7:30—News Headlines
 7:35—F.R.I.E.N.D.S
 8:00—Life on the Internet
 8:30—The Album Show
 9:10—Adventures of Brisco County
 10:00—News At Ten
 10:30—The Beast (Drama)

Amman cinemas

- Galleria I (Tel: 079 33430): High School High
- Galleria II (Tel: 079 33430): Addicted to Love
- Philadelphia I (Tel: 634149): G.I. Jane
- Philadelphia II (Tel: 634149): 007... Tomorrow Never Dies
- Plaza (Tel: 699238): I Know What You Did Last Summer
- Concord I (Tel: 677420): Risala Ila Al Wali (Arabic)
- Concord II (Tel: 677420): Mr. Bean

PROGRAMMES EN FRANÇAIS

SAMEDI
 16:30—Conan l'aventurier
 17:00—Cajou
 19:00—Le Journal
 19:15—Magazine L'oeuf de Colomb

DIMANCHE
 16:30—Conan l'aventurier
 17:00—Magazine Fant pas rêver
 19:00—Le Journal
 19:15—Le Tour de France

LUNDI
 16:30—Conan l'aventurier
 17:00—Thalassa
 19:00—Le Journal
 19:15—Magazine scientifique Cinq sur cinq

MARDI
 16:30—Conan l'aventurier
 17:00—Savoir plus santé
 19:00—Le Journal
 19:15—Têtes chereuses

MERCREDI
 16:30—Arsène Lupin
 17:00—Ushuaia
 19:00—Le Journal
 19:15—E-M6

JEUDI
 15:00—Qui est qui
 15:30—Au Casino de Paris
 19:00—Le Journal
 19:15—Atomes crochus

VENREDI
 15:00—Qui est qui
 15:30—Julie Lescaut
 19:00—Le Journal
 19:15—Allô la Terre

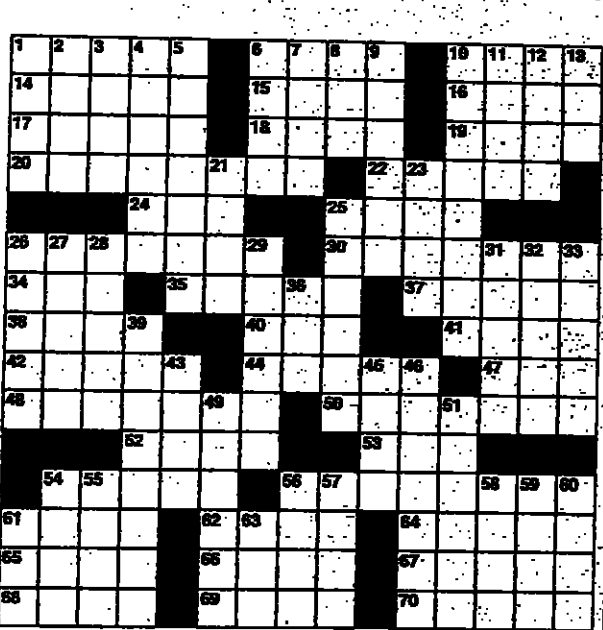
Programs are subject to change by JTV

Miss France 98



Sophie Thalmann (Miss Lorraine) won the title of Miss France 1998 in Deauville, in the Presence of Patricia Spehar (Miss France 1997) and Italian Singer Andrea Bocelli.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



- ACROSS**
 1 Check
 5 Pleasant to the taste
 10 Bogus
 14 Similar to
 15 Amnesia
 18 Bustle
 19 — brags
 20 Send, as payment
 21 Gracful
 22 Cap
 24 Word game
 24 Coffinated
 25 Cullen
 26 Hermetic
 31 Resting places
 34 Numero —
 35 Rose
 37 Hand sheet
 39 — poker
 41 Loafers
 43 She on
 44 French noggin
- DOWN**
 46 Happen again
 48 Depot abbr.
 49 Old fire made new
 51 Evident
 53 Kristoferson
 55 Mince
 56 Garage
 60 Assisted
 64 Sewerhead
 65 Former
 67 London
 68 Lane
 69 Encoral
 70 — vital
 71 Colored
 72 Richards or Taylor
 73 Remainder
 74 DOWN
 1 Slice
 2 Mah jongg piece
 3 Sooner
- State abbr.**
 4 Scooter
 5 Light
 6 Common verb
 7 Big cat
 8 Sweet
 9 Particular
 10 Passerine
 11 Israeli dance
 12 Gaseous
 13 Crowds
 21 Rainbow
 22 Pate de fole
 26 Part of Eur.
 27 — alla
 28 Way taken in traveling
 29 Frost
 30 Clan symbol
 32 Wash lightly
 33 Gallers
 36 Tern comb.
 38 Hollow
 38 Strike
- Seaman**
 40 Brightness
 45 Tossade
 47 Fully developed
 50 Greek lyric
 52 poet
 52 Weaver
 54 Attack
 56 School subject
 57 Jacob's
 58 Wax
 59 Family group
 61 Ashen
 62 Greek letters
 63 Hollow
 66 hasten

THIS WEEK'S HOROSCOPE

By Linda Black

Weekly Tip: The sun is in Aquarius, which is still good for scholarly subjects and working on computers.

Aries (March 21-April 19): This is a very good time for all kinds of athletic activities. Win or lose, you'll have a great time.

Taurus (April 20-May 20): There may be a little pressure from an older person. Soon your attention shifts to romance. If you're thinking of popping the question, now is a good time.

Gemini (May 21-June 21): You're learning faster than you can keep track of the information. You may also fall in love with one of your teachers.

Cancer (June 22-July 22): You're one of the best people you know at getting a good deal. Make that your focus. It's all starting to make sense.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22): You're very strong but you're up against a person you find quite irritating. Instead of arguing, split up the duties. If you do, you could make money.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Somebody else's emergency turns into your problem. Don't just hate it when that happens? Just concentrate on doing your work perfectly, and everything will be fine.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23): A get-together with friends proves very lucky for you. You're making a lot of new contacts.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21): You're either not feeling well or you've got a major project underway. The chances of your being able to stay home are not good.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): This is a wonderful time for travel, and also for any kind of activities involving higher education.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): You need to learn about money, especially other people's money. If you use it to your advantage, you can get just about anything you want.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): It looks like you've got a good partner. If you don't have one now, you need to develop one immediately.

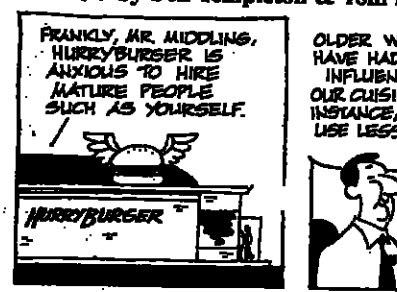
Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20): You have nothing but hard work and a stern taskmaster. But things start to mellow out, as a partner comes to your rescue.

If You're Having a Birthday This Week: Your focus is on partnerships, both personal and business. Don't give away your money too freely, or you'll learn a lesson the hard way.

PERKY & BEANZ by Russell Myers



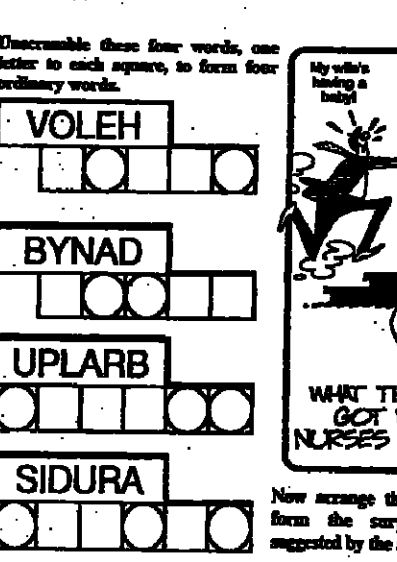
ELWOOD by Ben Templeton & Tom Forman



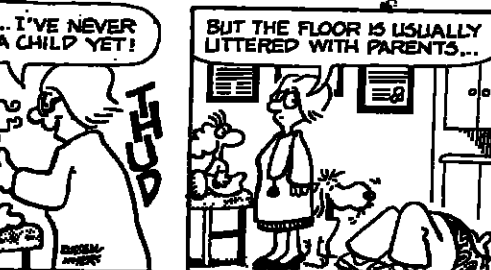
CATFISH by Fred Wagner & Tom Cone



Jumble



Print answer here: _____



Would You Believe...

They may look, walk and talk alike, but identical twins do not have the same fingerprints.

The average human drinks 16,000 gallons of water during a lifetime.

Before he became a painter, Paul Gauguin was a stock broker.

An average frown requires the work of 43 muscles.

The FBI first published its "10 Most Wanted" list in 1950.

The popular toy called the Teddy bear was named after Theodore Roosevelt.

The first Oreo cookie was sold in 1912 in New Jersey.

TRUE! by Daryl Cagle



Geese, roosters and 2,800 dogs attack mail carriers every year.

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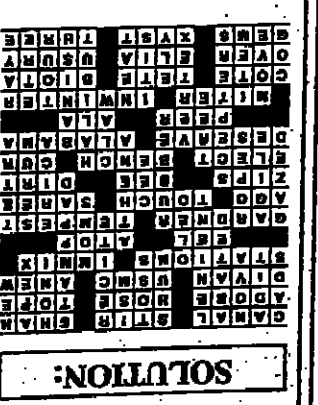
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Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to!



09-1-174P

Le Jourdain

Supplément en français du Star

Nouvelles du Pays

Culture

Le livre, ce marginal

Dans la région, la Jordanie ne fait pas exception. Comme ses voisins, elle semble boudier la littérature. Trop cher, censuré, déconsidéré, le livre s'oublie au fond des bibliothèques.



Non subventionné par l'État, le livre reste un produit de luxe inaccessible pour la majorité des Jordaniens.

Catastrophique. la situation du livre dans le monde arabe. Comme le révèle un récent article de Frédéric Matouk dans le quotidien Al Hayat, la production de livres dans l'ensemble des pays arabes équivaut à peine à la moitié de celle de la Belgique, un des plus petits pays d'Europe. Comme le remarque l'auteur, il y a cent ans on pouvait accéder à l'empire ottoman d'empêcher le développement de la culture arabe mais aujourd'hui ce n'est plus guère possible. Alors à qui la faute ?

En Jordanie la production de livres pour l'année 1997 s'élève à 843 titres, tous genres confondus. C'est un léger progrès par rapport aux années précédentes : selon les statistiques de la Bibliothèque nationale (BN) de Jordanie, de 1993 à 1995, il y avait entre 500 et 600 titres par an. En 1996, 722. Selon Majida Al-Hares, chargée du dépôt légal à la Bibliothèque, «cette hausse est en partie due à l'augmentation du nombre d'habitants dans le pays après la guerre du Golfe et à la création de nouvelles écoles et universités». La situation générale reste néanmoins médiocre, comparée à d'autres pays comme le Liban ou l'Égypte. La plupart des livres sont des manuels scolaires ou universitaires. Viennent ensuite les ouvrages d'histoire et de religion. La philosophie et l'art sont pratiquement ignorés (7 titres en philo et 19 pour l'art en 1997). Quant à la littérature, elle est sujette à des fluctuations étonnantes : 83 titres en 96, 194 en 97.

Plusieurs raisons à la faiblesse de la production livresque. «Un livre est cher (8 dinars minimum, NDLR) parce que le papier est cher, explique Osama Midgadi, directeur général de la BN, le pouvoir d'achat des gens est trop faible pour acheter des livres et la priorité est donnée à la nourriture plutôt qu'aux nourritures spirituelles». Et il ajoute en militant : «On parle de subventionner le livre qui est à mon avis aussi important. Le livre est en effet peu soutenu par l'État, pas d'exemption de taxes (il est considéré comme n'importe quelle marchandise), peu d'aide aux auteurs (à part l'achat et la distribution par la BN de quelques exemplaires). Etant donné le prix des ouvrages, même les professeurs d'université recommandent souvent à leurs étudiants de photocopier les livres dont ils ont besoin en violation flagrante du droit des auteurs et du copyright sur les livres.

D'autre part, non seulement la plupart des écrivains publient à compte d'auteur mais souvent ils subissent des mésaventures avec des éditeurs ou des imprimeurs. «Certains éditeurs, raconte Osama, exploitent les écrivains qui sont prêts à tous les sacrifices pour être publiés.

vendre. Aujourd'hui la moitié des exemplaires de mon livre s'entasse chez moi, l'autre moitié, je l'ai offerte à des amis». Morale de l'histoire selon la poétesse : «Les gens lisent peu, ils préfèrent aller au cinéma ou regarder la télé. C'est en grande partie dû à l'enseignement dans le pays. Pendant toute la scolarité d'un élève, on ne lui demande pas de lire un livre en entier. On n'utilise que les manuels et des morceaux choisis».

On s'aperçoit finalement que les écrivains et leurs livres ne sont guère respectés. Ils ne sont pas soutenus et doivent faire face également à toutes sortes de contraintes à commencer par la censure. La liste des ouvrages interdits en Jordanie est très longue et concerne aussi bien des auteurs jordaniens qu'étrangers. «Il y a un triple tabou sur la religion, la politique et la sexualité», résume Youssef Abd al-Aziz, célèbre poète jordani qui a reçu les plus hautes distinctions littéraires pour son œuvre, cela pousse les écrivains sérieux à se tourner vers l'étranger pour pouvoir se faire entendre. Beaucoup d'auteurs n'ont pu s'exprimer pleinement qu'après avoir émigré».

Toujours selon ce faiseur de vers, «le Ministère de la Culture n'a rien à voir avec la vraie culture. En vérité, les médias arabes sont dans les mains du pouvoir qui s'en sert pour son propre intérêt. Le gouvernement se méfie des intellectuels qui ont des idées progressistes. L'histoire des auteurs arabes, c'est l'histoire d'une oppression constante. Les plus grands poètes arabes sont morts brûlés ou empoisonnés sur l'ordre des sultans. De nos jours, les choses n'ont guère changé, même si les méthodes d'oppression ne sont plus les mêmes. Beaucoup d'écrivains, comme Adonis, ont dû fuir pour avoir brisé certains tabous». Dans un monde arabe en crise, la vie littéraire est paralysée. Et les écrivains, pessimistes, ne savent plus comment lutter contre la marginalisation du livre dans leur société. ■

Mona Qaddoumi

Ados : le plaisir de lire



Contrairement à une idée souvent répandue, les jeunes Français de 14 à 18 ans lisent et achètent des livres. Selon un sondage réalisé l'année dernière, plus de 80% des adolescents ont lu au moins quatre livres au cours des six derniers mois et plus de dix pendant l'année. Si écouter la musique reste le loisir préféré, les livres arrivent en deuxième position dans les dépenses personnelles. Près de la moitié d'entre eux achètent eux-mêmes leurs livres. Pour cela, ils dépensent en moyenne 310 francs par an (25 dinars). Pourquoi lire-on ? Par obligation scolaire bien sûr, mais aussi par goût personnel, par envie d'apprendre. Karine, 17 ans, collégienne à Reims, avoue une vraie curiosité. La lecture occupe une large place dans ses loisirs à côté du sport et de la musique. Karine devore en effet jusqu'à 100 pages par jour en moyenne. Quels types d'ouvrages lit-on ? La bande dessinée (voir photo) arrive en tête en particulier, d'après l'enquête, chez les garçons. Mais les romans d'amour et d'aventure viennent en deuxième position, devant la littérature classique. Les livres policiers et la science-fiction.

Analé, 16 ans, lycéenne à Paris, aime les grands classiques de la littérature française comme Guy de Maupassant et a aussi un faible pour les nouvelles et les pièces de théâtre. Elle place la lecture parmi ses loisirs préférés. «Pour le simple plaisir de lire, dit-elle, et parce que la lecture vous ouvre l'esprit, c'est indispensable pour la culture générale». Karine estime pour sa part que les lectures personnelles peuvent servir en classe : «Je me suis aperçue qu'en lisant beaucoup, j'avais plus de facilités pour m'exprimer et que m'a permis d'avoir de meilleures notes en français». Sans doute une excellente raison de prendre le temps de lire. ■

Le Jourdain

Total pour un assouplissement de l'embargo sur l'Irak

● Le président du groupe pétrolier français Total, Thierry Desmarest, juge nécessaire un allègement de l'embargo pesant sur l'Irak et notamment un assouplissement de l'accord «pétrole contre nourriture» afin de permettre aux Irakiens d'exporter plus de pétrole. «L'Irak a besoin d'un statut qui permette à sa population de vivre normalement, estime Thierry Desmarest, il y a bien eu quelques progrès, comme l'accord «pétrole contre nourriture», mais si on ne laisse pas les Irakiens importer des pièces détachées pour faire tourner les champs pétrolifères, cela ne servira à rien de les autoriser à exporter davantage de pétrole. Cet accord doit fonctionner avec plus de souplesse. Il faut des délais moins longs et des limites moins restrictives». Le Conseil de sécurité de l'Onu a approuvé la semaine dernière une proposition de son secrétaire général Kofi Annan de porter les ventes irakiennes de brut de 2 à 5,2 milliards de dollars par semestre pour financer l'achat de vivres et de médicaments. Selon le président de Total, l'embargo imposé à l'Irak «est une catastrophe pour la population et la structure sociale du pays». «Ce n'est bon pour personne», souligne-t-il. Son groupe, comme il le rappelle, négocie depuis quelques années son retour en Irak «en discutant notamment la mise en production d'un grand champ de pétrole».

Analyse

Les Ma'anais si proches des Irakiens

Ma'an sous le couvre-feu après des manifestations pro-irakiennes qui ont mal tourné. Comme d'habitude, c'est dans le sud que l'on ose dire tout haut, parfois violemment, ce que le reste du royaume pense tout bas. Le Jourdain vous dit pourquoi.



L'armée et les forces de police ont établi un quadrillage sans faille de la ville : impossible d'entrer ou de sortir. (AFP)

Certains intellectuels jordaniens font remarquer que «le XXème siècle jordaniens a commencé dans le sud et très probablement s'y terminera». Cette partie du pays a toujours su faire parler d'elle. Le sud a eu ses romanciers imminents et

engagés comme Ghaleb Halasch et Tayseer Shoubi, qui s'est donné la mort en 1971 en signe de protestation contre «le défaitisme des régimes arabes face à Israël» (ndlr). Le sud a surtout vécu au rythme de réactions populaires soudaines. On se

souvent d'avril 1989 : le feu de la révolte qui a ravagé un grand nombre de villes (y compris Salt) a éclaté d'abord à Ma'an. Taffleh et Kérak, à la suite de l'augmentation du prix des carburants. Ces événements, on le sait bien, ont inauguré le pro-

cessus démocratique dans le pays. On se souvient encore de 1996 et de la révolte du pain, quand les habitants de Kérak protestaient contre l'augmentation de 300% du prix du pain décidée par le gouvernement de Kabarti.

Pourtant le sud de la Jordanie est aussi connu pour son loyalisme. La semaine dernière, le roi Hussein n'a-t-il pas évoqué avec amertume devant les notables de Ma'an le souvenir de son grand-père le roi Abdallah qui, à quelques centaines de mètres des émeutes actuelles, avait commencé sa marche conquérante pour libérer la Transjordanie du joug ottoman en 1921 ?

Cette fidélité au roi n'empêche pas les sudistes de ressentir très durement leurs mauvaises conditions de vie : le chômage élevé et la pauvreté entretiennent la frustration ambiante.

À cela s'ajoutent des raisons liées à la crise irakienne.

Premièrement, à cause des restrictions sur les échanges

avec l'Irak imposées par l'Onu après la Guerre du Golfe, les habitants de Ma'an ont perdu une manne extraordinaire. «Nous n'avons jamais autant mangé de pain qu'à l'époque du commerce florissant avec l'Irak», regrette-t-on dans la cité aujourd'hui bouclée (voir encadré). Transporteurs, commerçants ou simples intermédiaires, des milliers de familles du sud ont profité des échanges entre Bagdad et le port d'Aqaba.

Agents de l'étranger

Deuxièmement, les jeunes gens se sentent proches du peuple irakien. Fuyant la pauvreté, nombre d'entre eux sont partis en Irak, à la faveur de bourses d'études. Ils sont revenus avec un fort capital de sympathie à l'égard du régime de Saddam Hussein qu'ils ont pu partager autour d'eux. Sans compter que politiquement, les populations bédouines du sud ont toujours défendu le panarabisme, se déclarant davantage arabes que jordaniennes.

L'influence des idées baassistes est cependant moins forte et moins organisée qu'à Kérak par exemple. Les habitants de Ma'an qui souffrent encore de la misère sont sans doute les mieux placés pour comprendre la tragédie qu'endure le peuple irakien depuis sept ans. Pour des raisons sociales essentielles, ils ont donc osé s'exprimer violemment sans craindre la répression. Enfin les rapports étroits d'une communauté à base tribale où tout le monde se connaît aident à forger des rassemblements pour des causes dont la justesse ne suscite aucune polémique.

Pour expliquer les émeutes, le gouvernement préfère parler d'«infiltrations de l'étranger». Ce refrain était déjà à la mode en 1996. À l'époque pourtant, tout le monde savait que l'augmentation du prix du pain n'avait pas besoin d'agents extérieurs pour pousser le peuple dans la rue. ■

Suleiman Sweiss

Visite d'une ville morte

Comme l'a dit le roi Hussein dimanche dernier, le calme est revenu à Ma'an après deux jours de manifestations qui ont fait un mort et une vingtaine de blessés. La ville de plus de 20.000 habitants, située à 220 kilomètres au sud d'Amman, appartient aux militaires, aux policiers de la sécurité publique et aux moudhabarat (services secrets). Un arc-en-ciel de beige sable, de bleu et de gris pour un quadrillage serré : la moindre rue, le moindre carrefour est surveillé par des hommes en armes, bâton au poignet ou fusil à l'épaule. Les accès à la ville sont le privilège des chars ou des camions militaires. Le ciel, celui des hélicoptères. Personne ne peut entrer ou sortir de Ma'an. Les habitants sont cloîtrés chez eux. Sauf les forces de l'ordre, les rues sont désertes. Les magasins ont tous tiré leur rideau

de l'intérieur. Même la mosquée est fermée. Les rues sont vides, les magasins fermés. Les rues sont désertes. Les magasins ont tous tiré leur rideau de l'intérieur. Même la mosquée est fermée. Les rues sont vides, les magasins fermés.

Un habitant de la cité interdite, rencontré dans des circonstances que nous préférons taire ici, prétend que le couvre-feu peut durer 20 jours, avant de préciser : «L'eau, l'électricité et le téléphone ont été coupés. Même la boulangerie est fermée. Pour aller acheter du pain, nous sommes obligés de nous cacher et de sauter les murs». Tout est calme à Ma'an. ■

Patrimoine

Les mosaïques ne meurent jamais

Cette technique connue sous apogée à l'époque byzantine. Unique au Moyen-Orient, l'école de mosaïstes de Madaba tente aujourd'hui d'en retrouver les gestes millénaires.

Dans un paysage de collines, le bastion des chrétiens de Jordanie : Madaba, située à 30 kilomètres au sud d'Amman. Madaba, ancienne cité mentionnée dans la Bible sous le nom de «Médaba», Madaba et bien sûr ses mosaïques, témoignages des premiers chrétiens, qui ornent les églises et les maisons byzantines au début de notre ère. Miraculeusement conservées malgré plusieurs tremblements de terre, ces œuvres d'art sont demeurées dans un état exceptionnel.

Pour continuer de la préserver et perpétuer cette technique née à Rome au Ier siècle avant J.-C., la Jordanie avec l'aide de l'Italie a ouvert une école de mosaïstes, la seule dans tout le Moyen-Orient. «Nous avons pensé que Madaba était la ville propice pour cette école car il y a ici une

grande quantité de mosaïques», explique Nawaf Gnosous, le directeur de l'établissement, ouvert en 1992 dans une maison traditionnelle au cœur de Madaba. Ils sont une quinzaine par promotion (sélectionnés sur concours) à apprendre les techniques de la mosaïque : des jeunes gens passionnés de 14-15 ans (dont plus de filles que de garçons) qui reproduisent les gestes de leurs ancêtres byzantins. Si les outils se sont perfectionnés, les étapes de fabrication d'une mosaïque sont restées à peu de choses près identiques : les tesselles sont coupées dans la matière première (brique ou marbre), posées sur un dessin préparé et consolidées par une couche de ciment ou de plâtre. Dans l'atelier de l'école, les élèves s'appliquent avec minutie, sous l'œil de leur profes-

seur, à acquérir un coup de main millénaire pour dessiner une fleur, découper telle lettre ou cisailier tel animal. Dans une autre salle, d'autres déjà plus aguerris restaurent d'anciens pavements.

«Un art oublié»

De huit heures du matin à 15h30, six jours par semaine, les étudiants reçoivent un enseignement complet puis- qu'outre les matières spécifiques (géologie, dessin...), ils suivent également le programme habituel exigé par le Ministère de l'Éducation (religion, mathématiques, biologie...).

Après quatre années d'études à ce régime de fermeté, dont une consacrée exclusivement à la pratique, les élèves obtiennent leur diplôme de



Une des œuvres des jeunes mosaïstes.

technicien en mosaïque. Ils peuvent ensuite poursuivre leur parcours à l'université ou se lancer directement dans la vie active.

L'un d'eux travaille aujourd'hui dans un atelier privé d'Amman : «Beaucoup de nos clients veulent des mosaïques chez eux. Nous faisons des tableaux, des tables etc...». Pour ce jeune artisan, les quatre mètres carrés qu'il produit

chaque mois représentent une expérience indispensable afin de progresser dans son travail. Après Madaba, les élèves partent donc prêcher la bonne nouvelle artistique résumée ainsi par une mosaïque : «Nous essayons de redonner vie à un art que beaucoup de gens ont oublié». ■

Amineh Ishtay

Madaba retrouvée au XIXème siècle

La découverte des mosaïques qui font aujourd'hui la richesse de Madaba n'est pas le fruit d'investigations archéologiques. C'est en effet dans des circonstances toutes particulières que fut mis à jour ce patrimoine, lors du repeuplement de la région par des familles venues de Kérak à la fin du XIXème siècle.

Depuis le VIIIème siècle, Madaba était quasiment tombée dans l'oubli après avoir connu plusieurs siècles de prospérité. Aux premiers Occidentaux qui visitèrent la contrée au début du XIXème, Madaba n'offrit qu'un champ de ruines sans grand attrait qui ne laissait rien présager des beautés que renferme son sol. Or en 1879, plusieurs familles bédouines chrétiennes de Kérak décidèrent d'émigrer vers le sud, suite à une dispute qui opposa une tribu chrétienne à une tribu musulmane. Quittant leurs terres sous la protection du patriarche de Jérusalem, ces familles vinrent s'installer à Madaba sur un

terrain qui, leur ôtant les autorités locales, les incitait à s'établir sur l'aire de l'antique cité et se mettre aussitôt à construire des habitations en dur. Ils repèrent la matière première dans les ruines, mais bien des décennies auparavant, le flux de découvertes s'était poursuivi, particulièrement par les fouilles de la mosaïque dite «des basiliques», qui fut découverte par les autorités de l'État ottoman de la région. Plusieurs familles d'émigrants contribuèrent à la mise au jour de cette mosaïque et réemployèrent les tesselles trouvées. Les mosaïstes jordaniens ont depuis travaillé à restaurer ces mosaïques, mais le travail est très pénible et les fonds des dépenses minimes.

Véronique Abou



Pour intégrer l'école de Madaba, les élèves doivent passer un concours trois ans avant le tawjihi.

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The plot drives the action in 'Palmetto' and 'Gingerbread Man'

By Stephen Hunter

ODD HOW sometimes the movies arrive in neat little clusters, begging to be studied as phenomenon rather than stories. For example, last Friday brought both "Palmetto" and "The Gingerbread Man." They are so similarly endowed they might as well be the same thing, and the phenomenon they call up is the problem of plot.

"Those looking for plot," observed the ever-helpful Mark Twain in words that every movie critic should take to heart, "will be shot." Yet plot is an eternal problem: How much is too much? How little is too little? Why do most movies fail at that level? And does such failure lead to general failure? How "realistic" does a plot have to be? What makes one plot work and another fail? What makes one movie get by on its plot and another not?

So in their way, "The Gingerbread Man" and "Palmetto" represent an opportunity to study the issue of plot in a kind of controlled laboratory setting. That's how freakishly similar they are. Both are ornate tales of conspiracy in the film noir tradition and both are directed by senior auteurs with great movies in their filmographies. Both star middle-range personalities who are talented and recognizable but not commanding. Both are set in specific Southern locales. Both play up the flora, fauna and architecture of such locales as well as the culture. Both are derived from other texts, which means they were not originally conceived for the screen, and both make the transition somewhat problematically.

"The Gingerbread Man," directed by the great Robert Altman ("MASH," "Nashville," "The Player") arrives from an idea by the best-selling legal novelist John Grisham. One supposes that besides the attractions of the story, the attractions of Grisham's famous name was a considerable inducement to the film's producers. After all, most of the other Grisham projects have grossed

more than \$100 million.

"Palmetto" has no such famous pedigree; it comes from a novel by the lightly regarded British wannabe hard-boiled novelist James Hadley Chase of the distant '30s, most famous for the hyper-violent "No Orchids for Miss Blandish." The book, titled "Just Another Sucker," appears to have sunk without a trace, and one wonders how it came to the attention of a major world filmmaker like Volker Schlöndorff, most famous for "The Tin Drum."

But both movies share an even more fundamental similarity: The plot, intricate and multilevel, is the principal concern of the films. They're not conceived as platforms for other attributes—performances, action set pieces, comedy, slapstick. They are the whole thing and nominally the source of each film's pleasures: reverses, twists, revelations and ironic endings. In this way, they feel very old-fashioned, for such pleasures have all but vanished from the nation's bistro, having been replaced by the more marketable components of the modern movie: style, banter and spectacle. And that's one of the key differences between then and now, for better or worse: Old movies had plots; new movies have attitudes.

Let's relate the new films to a more typical modern film in the same genre: the "Lethal Weapon" franchise, of which a fourth installment is due this summer. These films have rough generic connections to both "Palmetto" and "The Gingerbread Man": in that they're basically mysteries set in the milieu of urban or political corruption, featuring rogue heroes who must penetrate a conspiracy to stay alive. But the "Lethal Weapon" films are consummate modern pictures—the big selling point is the flamboyant action sequences. These are set against the hip, witty character between co-stars Mel Gibson and Danny Glover.

The plots around which they are built, however, are almost always brain-dead. The bad guys are identified early. Their

agenda, far from being secret, is gigantically obvious from the start—to move drugs, to steal gold, to sell guns (in the first three). There's no cleverness at all, and in a fundamental way, they do not parse. No real attention has been paid to character or motivation. The process of the movie is simply getting the good and bad guys in the same general location, and watching as they pop caps in ever larger numbers.

Plotwise, each "Lethal Weapon" film has about four story beats, as professional screenwriters call the arrival of complications; the old-fashioned "Gingerbread Man" has about 75. You've got to squinch up your eyes and remember for it to work at all. You've got to do some work. "Lethal Weapon" movies require almost no concentration; the stories progress visually and could have been narrated in pantomime, even by event. The two new oldies, by contrast, are almost nothing but dialogue, as each twist must be explained, related, assigned significance, then processed, and later recalled so that its meaning becomes clear. Talk, talk, talk.

But before we settle on a general theme—movies with plots good, movies with events bad—let's look at how each of these new films uses its plot and what it teaches us about not the strength but the weakness of plot.

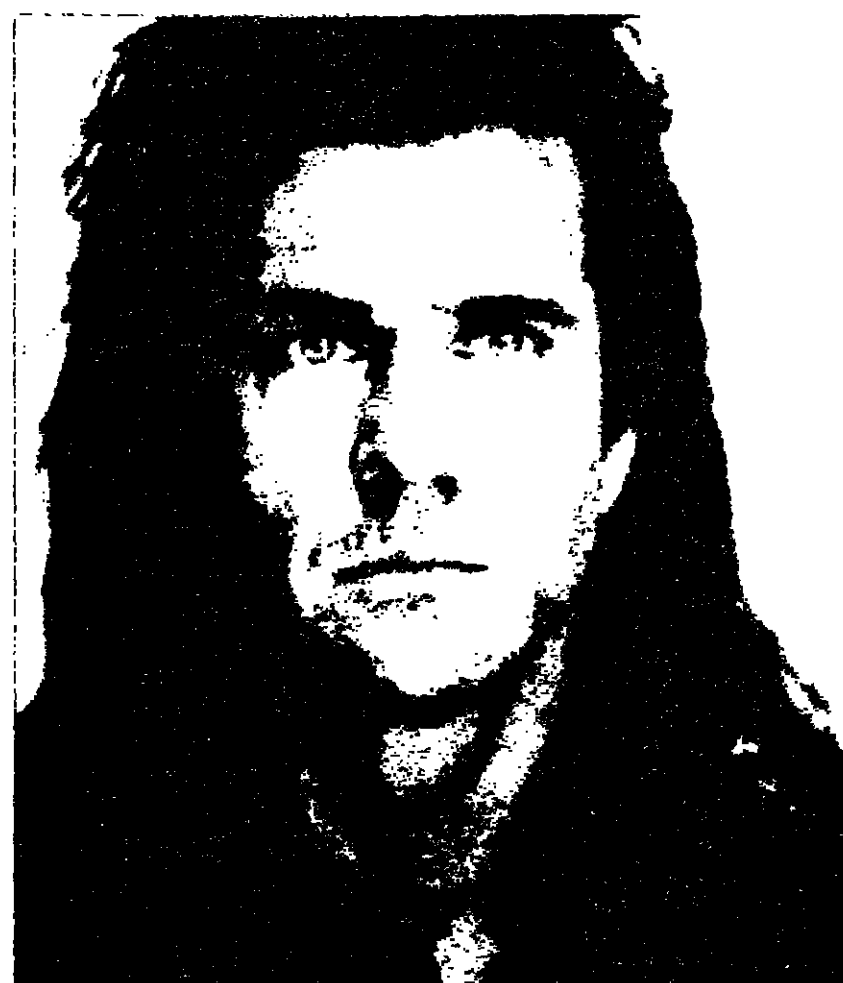
The two films share a fundamental flaw. Both are examples of a more generic story gambit that might be called tales of manipulation, which follow as some innocent party is engineered toward doing something against his own best interests but in the interests of the plotters. ("Vertigo" is the ultimate classic of the genre.) Male lust is the leverage by which the operation is commanded, and the films play off the folk wisdom that for most men, when sexual possibility rises, IQ diminishes. And both stories, while they seem to make some kind of sense at a nuts-and-bolts level—yes, if this happened, that could follow—and might be called "possible," make almost no sense at the

larger level. They are no more believable, in their ways, than "Lethal Weapon," and probably a lot less fun.

In "The Gingerbread Man," two conspirators plot to manipulate a supposedly brilliant lawyer into committing a murder against a person whose death will advance the plotters' own financial interests. The motive is sufficient to risk a capital crime, but the plot is an example of excess labor to produce a mouse of outcome. Moreover, it is predicated on an ability to accurately anticipate how a man stimulated to act irrationally will perform. It demands a psychological acuity not even the CIA possesses, as well as an efficient conduit of information and influence to the subject, all of it syncretized to a schedule as complex as the launching of a moon rocket. The plot is absorbing in its details, but it strains to produce a result that could have been achieved with so much less trouble. On top of that, the plot feels incredibly sophisticated, far beyond the humble powers of those who are ultimately revealed to have committed it.

"Palmetto's" take on the manipulation game follows an ex-jailbird, freighted with bitterness at the small Florida town that seems to have railroaded him into an unjust prison term. He is tricked into taking part in a phony kidnapping scam by a rich man's beautiful wife. The woman captures his obedience in the bedroom—and again her approach is built on a sure calculation of his psychological needs. The gimmick that he does all the moves she's planned, and he's left holding the bag when the kidnapping turns real, the money has been exchanged and someone has been murdered. He's the one on his way to death row while the true manipulators make off with the loot. Eventually, everybody is revealed to be somebody he is not.

Again, the details are correct and believable, but the whole thing becomes so crazily immense it stops making sense and seems ridiculous. The whole thing hangs together on casual coinci-



Mel Gibson

dences, luck, blind chance and stupidity. Again, the plot seems so much more ornate than one might have assumed from the capabilities of the conspirators.

And this yields still a stranger mystery: Why does one of these films work and one of them not?

For all the insanity rampant in "The Gingerbread Man," its story inabilities somehow don't quite betray it. It's a delicate balance, and now and then the movie seems to get out of hand. But Altman is able to hold it together on two higher values: believability of milieu and intensity of performance. You want to believe the movie, because its duplication of a real world and of real personalities has conviction and energy. While your conscious mind is saying, this is ridiculous, your heart is saying, yeah, yeah, yeah. You willingly put your disbelief on hold; you advance the storyteller enough margin to do his thing. You do this in anticipation—that is the contract of the story—that the ultimate resolution will be beguiling enough to justify your illogicality.

There's also a conscious contribution by the actors: Kenneth Branagh is so convincing as Rick Magruder, the beguiled lawyer, that you've been seduced into putting the conscious part

of your mind asleep. It doesn't matter if he behaves out of character now and then.

And so it works out. The outcome doesn't diminish what's come before, and it provides what might be called a nice goose of artificially induced pleasure. You've never believed, but you've forgiven, and all the yakety-yak seems worth it.

Alas, almost the dead opposite happens in "Palmetto," and possibly the heavily Teutonic Schlöndorff wasn't quite the man to guide this one. Woody Harrelson never seems real as an ex-reporter fallen on hard times. But even less real is the miscalculation that let Elizabeth Shue shut it up as the femme fatale. Both Harrelson and Shue have been brilliant before, but they are mismatched to the roles in odd ways and can't transcend their discomfort; they seem as unsure as we do. And without them as guides, we never break through the membrane into believability.

It's the singer, not the song, seems to be the message here: It's the director, not the story. He's the one who should be shot. ■

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THE STAR'S WEEKLY COMPUTING & HIGH TECH NOTES

Edited by Zeid Nasser

Wanted; a 'killer' application for PCTV

THE ALL-IN-ONE hi-tech revolution video telephony has come of age. But now, says Clive Cookson, it has to be marketed by Europe's biggest computer company. There is a need for a "killer application" to sell millions of its latest device, which brings together personal computing and Internet access with television and video telephony.

Siemens Nixdorf, being a conservative German company, is taking a cautious view of its clumsily named new "PCTV Multimedia Integration Box". As one of its executives said, when Siemens Nixdorf demonstrated a prototype to journalists at a conference in Athens this month: "If we were an American company we'd be hyping this to the skies".

The concept behind the box is far from being unique to Siemens Nixdorf. The explosive growth of the Internet and particularly the World Wide Web, which enables PC users to surf through a froth of highly illustrated "pages" has prompted many electronics companies to find ways of delivering net services on television.

Best known is WebTV, a small Californian company that was bought last year for \$425 million by Microsoft, the US software giant.

But Siemens Nixdorf has gone further than its competitors in bridging the gap between the worlds of information technology and home entertainment. Its device is

more than a "set-top box" that enables people to surf the web on a domestic television. Although it does this very well.

The PCTV also offers video telephony, with a little camera on top of the box, and a vast

that some combination of video telephony with home shopping or electronic commerce could be the killer.

In Athens, Siemens Nixdorf demonstrated a railway enthusiast navigating his way through the web sites of companies and clubs with model trains for sale and, then, calling up one of the vendors, who showed him a particular model (a continental crocodile-style electric locomotive) over the video phone. He paid for it with an electronic transfer of funds, using the same box. The company is taking advantage of an enormous improvement in the quality of video telephony.

New "compression" technology makes it possible to squeeze moving

range of entertainment, communication and online services. The primary component is a PC running Windows, with an infra-red device that works like a mouse. It can be attached to any other home electronics device, such as a CD or DVD (digital video disc) player.

The big question, says Peter Page, Siemens Nixdorf chief technologist, is whether the company and its partners can find the "killer application" that will make millions of people want to use the box. By itself, web surfing on TV will not do the trick. For that you do not need a machine in the \$500-\$850 price range. A much cheaper and simpler set-top box will deliver adequate Internet access. It is possible, however,

pictures down telephone lines far more effectively than even a couple of years ago, reducing the flickering jerkiness that has so irritated earlier users of video phones.

Siemens Nixdorf is unlikely to sell PCTVs directly to consumers. The company believes it is more likely to find a mass market by working through service providers such as telephone and cable television companies. These would market the whole package box plus applications to users. They could subsidize the high initial price of the box for people who sign up for the service, just as mobile phone companies often do for handsets. To test the water, the company is carrying out a small trial with Deutsche



Shifting to European currency will demand massive changes: Tackling the 'Euro' electronically

ALONG THE lines of the Year 2000 problem, facing computer systems everywhere: there is a rising fear of another problem, that will result from the shift to the unified European currency, the 'Euro'.

Apparently, massive amounts of data on financial and management systems all over Europe will have to be 'adjusted' to accommodate the change in currency that should take effect starting in 1999.

The Gartner Group, a worldwide consultancy corporation, estimated that these 'adjustments' could amount to as

much as \$ 100 billion in costs across the globe; especially as a transitional phase will involve the use of both the Euro and the local currency. That will demand considerable software re-engineering in European Union countries!

The effects of shifting to the Euro should also affect non-European Union firms, but which have business with Europe.

Gartner Group believes that solving the 'Euro' problem may even be more costly and complicated than the year 2000 problem.

Accordingly, many experts

are raising their voice, demanding solid solutions to this issue.

Once again, what is bad news for companies is good news for programmers, as software experts who develop their skills to best tackle the 'euro' problem will be highly in demand.

In a way, the Year 2000 and Euro problems deliver proof of how dependent our modern civilization has become on computers. Any shift or change required, which wasn't originally built into the program can be a potential source of havoc. ■

Seagate to 'pack' more data on hard disks

SEAGATE TECHNOLOGY will announce a method to use lasers, microscopic lenses and tiny mirrors to store 10 to 20 times more data onto computer hard disk drives.

Seagate has been working in the data storage industry for three decades, and has always been at the forefront of devel-

opments in the field.

The new mechanism, called Optically Assisted Winchester technology, will allow Seagate to overcome a problem which the hard disk industry was bound to face: due to the fact the fast-paced development of computers will result in reaching a stage whereby maximum

storage imaginable is achieved within a decade! To avoid that obstacle, Seagate uses tiny optics, which sit on the drive's recording head and shine a tiny swathe of laser light on the drive's recording platter. That swathe acts as the boundary within which magnetic signals are recorded. ■

Is a thinner, leaner PC 'smarter'?

WITH THE arrival of network computers, java stations and compact personal computers, one has to note that trend for thinner PCs is picking up. Network computers in particular, started out life as stand-alone boxes that had to

be hooked up to keyboards and monitors. Today, however, the network computer concept has taken the form of a cut-down PC: complete with screen, mouse, keyboard and even tower case. But it is a slimmer, shorter



and trendier tower. Also, slim desktop versions are available that make a computer case look more like a small video.

Designers are having a field day with Java stations, creating computer cases with 'avant garde' cases that have curves and irregular angles.

Who knows, maybe your PC will soon become a 'designer item'. ■

Telecom subscribers in Berlin.

"We want to get it right first in Germany and then elsewhere in Europe," says Page. "We don't want to go straight into the US; the Americans wouldn't accept something like that from a European supplier."

Up-market hotels are another promising field for PCTVs one that Siemens Nixdorf is investigating with Holiday Inns. The idea is that they would enhance the televisions in guests' rooms with the technology, which would enable travellers not only to check local facilities and attractions, but also to log on to their own home or office computer. Although it is possible to do this today if you take a powerful laptop and plug it into a

telephone socket, the PCTV should give a more reliable connection and a far better display. To provide additional security, the box can include a reader of electronic chipcards (smartcards).

Anyone with the interests of the European electronics industry at heart will hope that Siemens Nixdorf can find and then exploit that elusive killer application.

However, for all its technical excellence, the German company has a cautious disposition and a reliance on corporate computing that makes some observers doubt whether it can move boldly enough. ■

Financial Times

The Star
Online
<http://star.arabia.com>

Arigato Nagano, see you in Salt Lake City in 2002

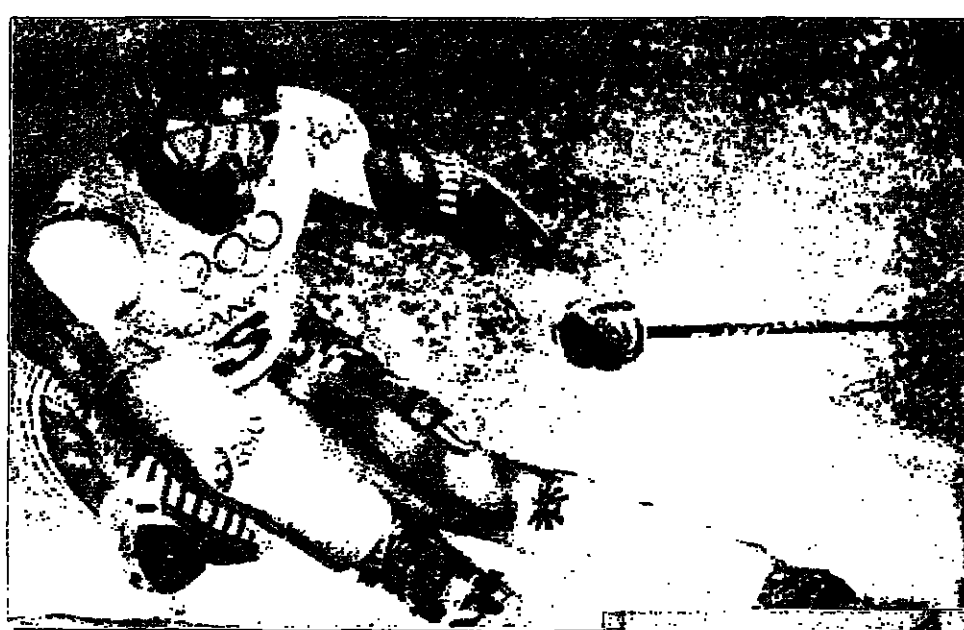
NAGANO Japan—Saying farewell to a weather-beaten but roundly successful Winter Olympics, Nagano thanked the world Sunday by illuminating a dark, chilly Japanese valley with starbursting fireworks, the orange flames of traditional bonfires and the glow of 50,000 handheld lanterns.

And in the end—after two weeks of snow, rain, more snow, still more snow and finally even an earthquake—Nagano da "Sayonara! Sayonara!" shouted the master of ceremonies, comedian Kin'ichi Hagimoto.

bedecked in a cartoonish white and red top hat. "Arigato gozaimashita!" he said, using the Japanese word for thank you—a word anyone who has spent the past 14 days here will never forget. Then he shed his topcoat and threw his

hat rakishly into the winter air. The American team marched in with equal exuberance, carrying a banner inviting everyone to Salt Lake City, home of the 2002 Winter Olympics. "Thank you, Nagano," it said; U.S. hockey gold medalist Karyn Bye held up the right corner. Some Americans rode on others' shoulders, and the Japanese, greeted by a flag-waving, horn-blasting hometown crowd, strode in to an even more special sight: their emperor, Akihito, grinning and clapping his hands over his head as Empress Michiko whispered in his ear.

"Congratulations, Nagano and Japan," IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch said in his speech at the closing ceremony. "You have pre-



sented to the world the best organization in the history of the Olympic Winter Games."

That praise fell short of the ultimate accolade of "the best Winter Games ever" that Samaranch bestowed on Lillehammer four years ago. But it was more enthusiastic than the label "indeed most exceptional" that he used to describe the troubled 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta.

Samaranch also noted with gratitude the fact that the nations of the world had upheld the terms of a nonbinding U.N. resolution calling for no military hostilities during the games.

"We hope that the observance of the Olympic Truce during the Nagano Olympic Winter Games has served the purpose of searching for peaceful and diplomatic solutions to the conflicts we are facing today," he said.

Added Goro Yoshimura, vice president of the Nagano organizing committee: "It is my particular hope that our friends in Salt Lake City will keep our torch of peace burning. I am convinced that the practice of sports contributes to a peaceful and better world. I love the Olympics. I'm so sad to see them end," said Tamayo Kimura, an office worker. "The games were a big success. I think."

Just like the opening cere-

mony, the end of the last Winter Olympics of the 20th century was a mosaic of East and West, traditional and modern wrapped up in a hometown festival: Lion dances, bonfires, harvest festival rituals, "Snowlets" mascots and a catchy Japanese pop rhythm—all against the backdrop of the breathtaking Japanese Alps, commemorated in a haunting composition, "Reverberations of the Myriad Peaks."

But exactly what reverberated across Nagano's myriad peaks? Weather, for one. Perhaps the defining event of these games, the strange meteorology of the past two weeks bedeviled organizers and beleaguered athletes, forcing cancellations, rescheduling and general befuddlement all around.

Nagano Mayor Tasuku Tsukada presented the Olympic flag to Deedee Conrad, mayor of Salt Lake City, home of the next Winter Games in 2002. Later, the Utah vanguard a stagecoach and riders on horseback reconnoitered the arena with a once-around and gave the Japanese a taste of what the next Winter Olympics might hold.

Fireworks fuses zoomed



like missiles to their targets, lighting up streamers and turning the sky into daytime at dusk. Colorful looped flags of myriad colors and designs swarmed the stadium, clothed eyes jutting in the air. Then the ritual gave way to fun. The Japanese pop group Agharta performed "Ile Aye," or "Let's Make a Circle and Dance"—the theme song of the Snowlets mascots. The drums played. The lights came on. And, the Olympic flame extinguished and the flag passed on, they did something in Nagano they've been threatening to do for days: They relaxed. ■

Winners and Losers of Nagano '98

Shiny moments in Nagano

■ Karyn Bye draped in a flag after the U.S. women's hockey team won the sport's first Olympic gold medal by beating nemesis Canada 3-1.

■ American skier Picabo Street, capturing the super-G gold medal with a go-for-broke zeal that abandoned her when she went for a second medal and lost in the downhill.

■ Japan's golden glory: speedskater Hiro-yasu Shimizu, setting an Olympic record by skating 500 meters in 35.76 seconds—then besting himself a day later with a 35.59. And Masahiko Harada, coming back from a dismal jump to tie teammate Takanobu Okabe for the longest jump on skis in Olympic history 137 meters.

■ Austria's Hermann Maier, careening through the air and the snow in a spectacular crash, then dragging his bruised body back to win two gold medals.

■ The Czechs, behind goaltender Dominik Hasek, stealing Canada's chance for Olympic gold in men's hockey, winning 2-1 in a thrilling post-overtime semifinal shootout. The Czechs won the gold on Sunday, 1-0, over Russia.

■ Tara Lipinski's irrepressible exuberance after becoming the youngest figure skater to win the gold medal. She sprinted to center ice to take her bows. She hugged. She yelled. She grinned every inch the 15-year-old in every good way.

■ Curling, a strange sport of sweeping and stones, made its Olympic medal debut. And snowboarding: The sport of rebellious charmers had a bumpy first games when a Canadian snowboarder lost his gold after testing positive for marijuana, then got the medal back on appeal.



Falliers in Nagano

Some athletes didn't get a medal at all included some unexpected names:

■ Alberto Tomba, Wayne Gretzky and American figure skater Nicole Bobek, whose bumps, skids and falls made for some of the games' most excruciating images. She finished 17th.

■ The US men's hockey finished last in man-yyes when, after being eliminated from the tournament by the Czech's.

West Asian Zone qualifiers end tomorrow

By Abdel Hamed Addasi
Special to The Star:

THE FINAL round of the West Asian Zone basketball qualifiers matches which are played in the Sport's Palace in Al-Husseini Youth City will be played tomorrow, when Al-Jazireh Aramix, the Kingdom's reigning champions will meet Al-Riyadi of Lebanon at 4 pm in an important match to decide the qualifier to the Asian Club Championship which will be held in Malaysia from 25 April till 2 May.

In the second match, Syrian's Al-Wihdey will play Zobhan of Iran at 6 pm.

Five teams are competing to win the sole qualifying berth to the Asian Club Championship includes Al-Jazireh Aramix of Jordan, Al-Riyadi of Lebanon, Zobhan of Iran, Al-Wihdey of Syria and Al-Mina of Yemen. ■



Michael Cumberland, an american star in Al-Riyadi

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